

THE CONCORD SAUNTERER



*To we saunter toward the Holy Land;
Till one day the sun shall shine more
brightly than ever he has done, shall
perchance shine into our minds and
hearts, and light up our whole lives
with a great awakening light, so warm
and serene and golden as on a
bank-side in Autumn.*

New Series

Volume 5

Fall 1997

Published by The Thoreau Society

THE CONCORD SAUNTERER

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The front-cover image of Thoreau's Walden Pond cabin, based on a drawing by Henry's sister Sophia, appeared in the first printing of *Walden* in 1854. The passage about sauntering is from Thoreau's "Walking" manuscript. The likeness of Thoreau on the back cover is from an 1856 Benjamin D. Maxham daguerreotype, owned by the Thoreau Society.

THE CONCORD SAUNTERER, an annual publication of The Thoreau Society, Inc., seeks biographical, historical, textual, bibliographical, and interpretive articles relating to Henry Thoreau and his associates, Concord, and Transcendentalism. Submissions of all lengths are invited; shorter pieces not used will also be considered for the quarterly THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN. Contributions should conform to *The Chicago Manual of Style* for endnote documentation. Send two copies plus a stamped return envelope to the Editor, THE CONCORD SAUNTERER, Department of English, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353. Decisions are reported within three months. Subscription to THE CONCORD SAUNTERER is by membership in the Society; see the back cover for additional information. THE CONCORD SAUNTERER is indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography*.

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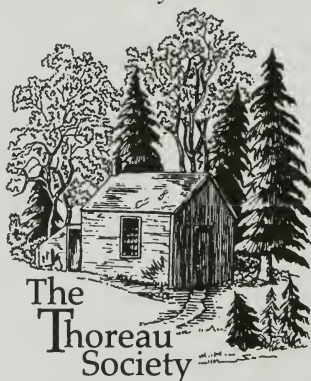
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Founded in 1941

Editor's Pages

It's been an eventful and auspicious year in Thoreau Country. The new library at the Thoreau Institute in Lincoln is finished and now being stocked with the core collections of (in alphabetical order) Raymond Adams, Walter Harding, and Roland Robbins, given to the Thoreau Society for this specific purpose. Modestly scaled and harmoniously integrated into Walden Woods, the library is nothing short of monumental in its contents and reach. Soon Thoreauvians everywhere will be able to visit the most comprehensive Thoreau-related library in the world, many in person but most through the internet as the evolving holdings go on line. But *technology*—and *Henry Thoreau*? It is helpful to remind ourselves that, ambivalent about technology though he was, Thoreau objected not to “improved means” but rather to the “unimproved end” to which they were often put. (See, on this point, “Henry Thoreau and the Advent of American Rail” in this issue.) The goal of the Thoreau Society and the Thoreau Institute is, first and foremost, the improved end of Thoreauvian education.

In addition to the library, that mandate to educate has also involved the Thoreau Society in other collaborative efforts. Now in its second successful year, a lecture series at the Concord Museum has featured many Society volunteers as speakers and organizers. The same is true of the various programs for educators and students of all grade levels offered at or through the Thoreau Institute. The Society has also begun an ambitious program of publications including a series of books presenting Thoreau's comments on various topics as edited by experts in those areas of Thoreauvian thought. To be published by long-time Thoreau purveyor Houghton Mifflin, these books will all carry the Thoreau Society imprint. That same imprint will also grace a separate series of classic works on Thoreau that are presently out of print.

For those wondering where, in all this “Thoreauvian” education, is the eye-opening encounter with nature—called by Emerson “the first in importance of the influences upon the mind”—there is a welcome answer. The July 1997 annual meeting in Concord involved more contact with nature than any other Society gathering ever (with the possible exception of the much longer Fiftieth Anniversary Jubilee). From thoughtful explorations of local gems such as the Concord, Assabet, and Sudbury Rivers, Estabrook Woods, and Walden Pond itself, to field trips to Mount Wachusett and other Thoreauvian haunts, the outdoors was consciously engaged at the 1997 gathering—and will be hereafter. Last summer also, a group of Society members journeyed to Millinocket, Maine, to present a plaque to Baxter State Park for its stewardship of Mount Katahdin, icon of the Thoreauvian sublime and the “highest land” in Thoreau's pantheon of sacred mountains. Featuring more than just a standard testimonial dinner, the trip also included a

tributary climb of Katahdin itself and, for some, an aerial excursion over all of Thoreau's Maine Woods. A highlight in the truest sense, the Katahdin trip will be repeated this summer by another Society-sponsored group. This year, too, a Society expedition will visit Thoreau's Cape Cod beaches. Participants are now being enlisted for both trips.

Because enjoying nature requires preserving it, the Thoreau Society is rightly involved in the preservation of all Thoreau Country. Close to home, the salvation and preservation of Walden Pond, Walden Woods, Estabrook Woods, and Thoreau's birthplace farmstead on Virginia Road are initiatives that deserve—and receive—Society support. All of these endeavors face obstacles ranging from insufficient finances to, in the case of Estabrook, impending encroachment by development on what should be secured as an ecological and historical treasure. Yet there is also reason to hope. In all four instances public consciousness has to some degree been raised—a consciousness that, as Henry said, has the power, if harbored in the mind, “to float the British Empire like a chip.” Expressed in other Concord-related terms, the alarm has been given and the citizenry aroused. We wait now to see who—and how many—will gather to defend home ground in which we all have a stake. For Thoreau Country, numbers will determine, one way or another, how much day is yet to dawn.

This fifth anniversary issue in the “new series” of *The Concord Saunterer* is the largest in the history of the journal, which began publication in 1966. Thoreauvians are a varied lot, but there should be something here for almost everyone. The mix of topics and treatments includes (but is not limited to) ecology, natural history, nature writing, geography, philosophy, poetry, mythology, technology, history, and criticism—involving (among others) John Muir, John Brown, Franklin B. Sanborn, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Anne LaBastille, and, pervasively, Henry David Thoreau. And among the eleven articles in this our most international issue yet are contributions from Australia, England, and Sweden.

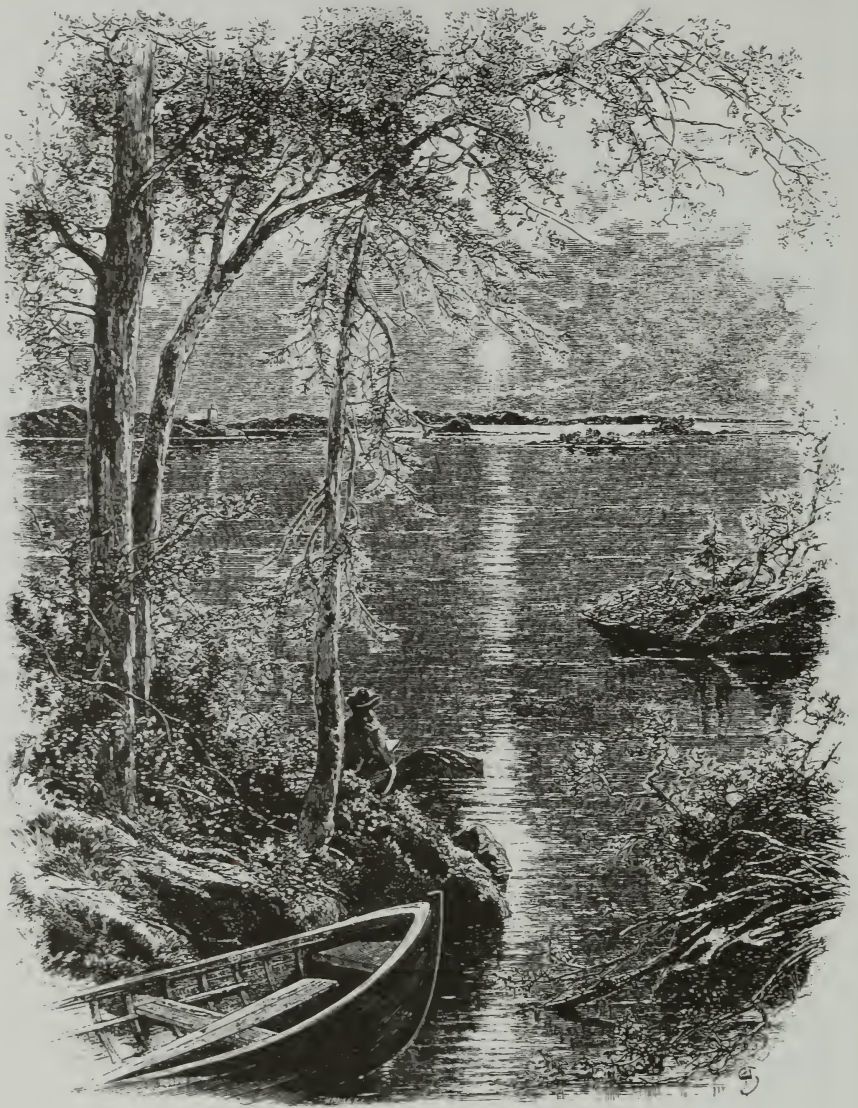
Comments and questions about *The Concord Saunterer* are always welcome and should be directed to the editor at East Carolina University (full address on inside front cover). For information on the Thoreau Society, the Thoreau Institute, efforts to preserve Thoreau Country, and upcoming excursions and activities, contact The Thoreau Society, 44 Baker Farm, Lincoln, Massachusetts 01773; phone number (781) 259-4750; e-mail address ThoreauSociety@walden.org; website www.walden.org.

Announcements

ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance now offers a twenty percent discount on subscriptions to Thoreau Society members. See the advertisement at the end of this issue.

Back issues of *The Concord Saunterer*, New Series, Volumes 1-5 (1993-1997) are available at \$10.00 for a single copy and \$8.00 each for multiple copies (same or different annual issues). There is an international postage surcharge of \$8.00 per copy (\$2.00 for Canada and Mexico), payable in U.S. funds or by international money order. International orders are shipped by air mail. Order individual copies from our editorial address (inside front cover). Thoreau Society members receive a subscription to *The Concord Saunterer*. For membership information see the inside rear cover.

Books and merchandise advertised in this issue of *The Concord Saunterer* are available from the Thoreau Society store, The Shop at Walden Pond. Thoreau Society members receive a ten percent discount on all purchases. See the advertisement at the end of this issue.



Engraving by James D. Smillie
from *Picturesque America* (published 1874)

Rethinking Thoreau and the History of American Ecology

**Frank N. Egerton
Laura Dassow Walls**

The current interest in Thoreau and science continues a longstanding debate over the value of Thoreau's observations to science. This debate was complicated by the fact that Thoreau's theories and observations were carried out in a science that did not, in any formal sense, yet exist: ecology. The first attempt to describe Thoreau's ecological studies within a broad historical tradition was Frank Egerton's 1976 survey article on the history of American ecology.¹ At that time, several good articles on Thoreau and ecology already existed, and since then even more such studies have been published, stimulated not by Egerton's article (which went largely unnoticed by Thoreau scholars) but by the increasing interest in both Thoreau and ecology.²

While Egerton's survey of three centuries of American ecology retains its usefulness for placing Thoreau's work within a broader context, the recent publication of *Faith in a Seed* has fundamentally broadened the basis for judging the place held by Thoreau.³ Before, the most astute assessment of Thoreau's relationship to science seemed to him to be that of the literary critics, who saw in Thoreau's work signs of an irresolvable conflict between literary artistry and scientific methodology. Now, by contrast, it seems clear that Thoreau's scientific critics, whose evaluations of his place in science were both less well known and far more enthusiastic, were in fact more responsive to Thoreau's considerable achievements in ecology. In the wake of *Faith in a Seed*, new, detailed assessments of Thoreau and ecology are emerging which offer a necessary corrective to earlier views. The following remarks offer an interim guide to the literature, and an overview of the reasons for the changing evaluations of Thoreau's contributions to ecology.

To understand why this change is so dramatic, one needs to keep in mind both the history of ecology and the history of the posthumous publication of

Thoreau's writings. Although "ecology" as a science was named in 1866, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that it began to be organized as a scientific field. To complicate the term still further, since 1970 the environmental movement has often borrowed the name "ecology" to signify a concern for preserving the environment, although the science and the political movement are quite distinct.⁴

Despite the terminology being quite recent (meaning that Thoreau lived before this science was named or organized), an interest in ecological subjects such as the "balance of nature" has existed since antiquity.⁵ In Thoreau's day, discussions of such subjects were lumped under the very broad heading of "natural history," even as particular sciences were emerging from natural history as professional fields in their own right: chemistry, geology, botany, zoology and, rather more slowly, ecology itself.

The older domain of natural history had been organized according to the traditional division of animal, vegetable, and mineral, which made theoretical connections difficult to identify and analyze. Carl Linnaeus (1707-78) offered the earliest conceptual framework for a theory of natural relationships by formalizing the balance of nature as the "economy of nature," an influential concept he first outlined in 1749.⁶ Linnaeus also developed the study of "phenology," a correlation between climate and biological activity; although the term itself was not used until the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of the "calendar" of natural activity was important through the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries.⁷ Finally, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) attempted to use the globe itself as a framework for the study of the interconnectedness of all natural phenomena, organic and inorganic, in his science of "physical geography"⁸—a science that Ernst Haeckel, in 1866, named "ecology."

Thoreau's own ecological perspective came from four sources and was therefore a complex and changing aspect of his intellect. These sources were: (1) his love of nature, which goes back to his childhood experiences and was an important part of his feelings throughout his life; (2) his readings, which were influenced by this love of nature; (3) his experiences in nature, which were influenced by both his feelings and his readings; and (4) his transcendentalism, which was influenced by, though not identical with, the views of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Three scientists whose work and writings were very important for the development of ecology exerted a particular influence, both direct and indirect, on Thoreau: Linnaeus,⁹ Humboldt,¹⁰ and Darwin.¹¹ Thoreau's first exposure was to the ideas of Carl Linnaeus, who was a very influential professor in Sweden now best remembered for having founded binomial nomenclature and hence modern plant and animal taxonomy. Yet Linnaeus was also central to the founding of ecological ideas, both directly and through his influence on his students: practi-

cally all of the doctoral dissertations which his students defended were virtually written by Linnaeus, who also had them published. At least a dozen of these had ecological themes, the most important of which were on what we call the balance of nature and on phenology, which were called respectively by Linnaeus and his contemporaries "economy of nature" and "calendar of nature."¹² One of his students, the Scandinavian botanist-explorer Pehr Kalm (c. 1715-79), gained his own ecological perspective from studying under Linnaeus; after his travels in North America from 1748-51, Kalm published a three-volume account of the vegetation, wildlife, and climate in the British Colonies, a work which Thoreau also read and which could claim for Kalm the honor of being the first ecologist in America.¹³

Thoreau admired the writings of both Humboldt and Charles Darwin (1809-82), which he first encountered between 1849 and 1851. Both authors wrote important narrative science reports of their explorations in Latin America, with Darwin being strongly influenced by Humboldt's example. Both managed to be reasonably objective in making scientific observations while also intermixing their personal responses to both the nature and civilizations which they encountered. Humboldt had a particular interest in humanity's relationship to the cosmos and he drew upon his own encyclopedic knowledge to discuss the matter. By contrast, Darwin had little inclination to discuss metaphysics in print, but he did end *The Origin of Species* (1859) with the brief observation that his theory of evolution by natural selection, if valid, would throw light on humanity's place in nature.¹⁴

Thoreau's own interest in humanity's place in nature saw its first expression in two early essays, published (for the first time) too late for use in Egerton's 1976 survey, but making evident the importance of the concept of phenology for Thoreau's earliest thinking. The first, titled "The Seasons," was written in 1828 or 1829 and shows his early fascination with the subject. It is only four paragraphs long, one for each season, and prefaced by four lines of poetry which suggest his youthful allegiance to the doctrine of divine design:

Why do the Seasons change? And why
Does Winter's stormy brow appear?
It is the word of him on high,
Who rules the changing varied year.¹⁵

His second phenological essay, written March 31, 1836, was stimulated by his reading of William Howitt's *The Book of the Seasons; or the Calendar of Nature* (1831). Thoreau praises the organizing idea of Howitt's book, which is "neither too scientific" nor "too miscellaneous and catch-penny" and can be adapted from "the climate and customs of England" to natural scenery in any clime or nation. Proceeding month by month, Thoreau quotes liberally from Howitt and adds

occasional comments loosely evocative of New England seasons.¹⁶ Thanks to Robert Sattelmeyer's study of Thoreau's reading, we know that Thoreau referred to Howitt's book three more times, twice in his *Journal* in 1853 and 1854, and once in his *Commonplace Book* of 1856-61, when his interest in phenology was apparently more extensive than it had been in 1836.¹⁷

The books and essays which Thoreau himself published are helpful for evaluating his contributions to ecology, but consideration of them is beyond the scope of this brief essay. Of more immediate interest here is Thoreau's *Journal* (1837-61), which is full of ecological observations and comments. H. G. O. Blake's four volumes of extracts—*Early Spring in Massachusetts* (1881), *Summer* (1884), *Winter* (1887), and *Autumn* (1892)—represent the *Journal*'s dominant phenological focus.¹⁸ Even without scholarly annotations, Blake's volumes aroused enough interest in Thoreau's *Journal* to motivate Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen to publish their "almost complete" fourteen-volume edition (1906), which is annotated and indexed.¹⁹ The Princeton edition, which is currently being published, meets the much higher standards of contemporary scholarship than existed at the time of these earlier editions and includes portions previously omitted.²⁰

It is possible to argue, as has Sharon Cameron, that the *Journal* is a complete and finished work on its own terms and should be read as it is, rather than excerpted in the manner of H. G. O. Blake, or read merely as a source for Thoreau's more formal works.²¹ Ironically, this is itself an ecological question, as Thoreau himself recognized: perhaps thoughts "written down thus in a journal might be printed in the same form with greater advantage—than if the related ones were brought together into separate essays. They are now allied to life." By analogy, Thoreau wonders whether the flower looks better "in the nosegay—than in the meadow where it grew—& we had to wet our feet to get it!"²² Thoreau saw the attractiveness of leaving the *Journal* in its natural state, but he also "mined" it for thematic purposes: It is thus possible to see in the later years of the *Journal* the gathering materials for the projects which Thoreau planned but did not live to complete, and here the full importance of Thoreau's increasingly ecological work becomes apparent.

Much of this work was gathered into an essay of special ecological interest, his address to the Middlesex Agricultural Society on "The Succession of Forest Trees" (1860), which contains important original observations and conclusions.²³ Yet this essay was only a brief early version of a much greater project on forest reproduction. The longer manuscript, *The Dispersion of Seeds*, incomplete at Thoreau's death, is now available in an attractive edition, edited with great care by Bradley P. Dean.²⁴ Readers of Thoreau's *Journal* will not find novel material in this newly published work, but rather a novel commitment to his discoveries without worry about squaring these accounts with his poetic temperament. Instead, what emerges is an experimental new approach to mediating science and

poetry without sacrificing either, an approach which evidences a new concern about engaging readers in his intellectual interest in ecological problems and in his growing concern about preservation and management of natural areas.²⁵

It would be risky to imagine that this work signifies a permanent shift in attitude, which, though a possibility, would have become evident only had Thoreau lived longer. We may ask, however, what motivated him to set aside another, more characteristically Thoreauvian work, *Wild Fruits*, to spend his last creative efforts on a more strictly ecological treatise.²⁶ Part of the answer must be that he realized that he had accumulated a long series of observations which could be organized into a coherent, original treatise on forest reproduction in New England, and that it could provide an understanding of how to better manage woodlots. However, additional motivation also seems to have come from his reading in 1860 of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

Thoreau had read Darwin's *Journal of Researches* in 1851 and had been interested enough to abstract several portions of it into his own *Journal*,²⁷ and thus he already knew by 1860 that Darwin shared his own interest in the interrelationships of living nature. What he realized from reading the *Origin* was that his knowledge of forest reproduction would interest Darwin and Darwin's readers, and therefore it was worthwhile organizing his knowledge into his own treatise. It is unfortunate that he did not live long enough to have it published, for it would have established a secure place for Thoreau as a founder of modern ecology.

Instead, that honor usually goes to another defender of Darwin's theory of evolution, the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), who coined the word "ecology" in 1866 and defined it (in language reminiscent of Alexander von Humboldt's) as "the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment including, in a broad sense, all the 'conditions of existence.'" These are partly organic, partly inorganic."²⁸ Yet it would still be another twenty years before botanists and zoologists began to organize a formal science of ecology, during the 1890s and early 1900s.²⁹ The pressures of professionalization left their mark on the early formation of the science: because some critics scoffed that those involved in this effort were just giving new names to a very old natural history, some ecologists felt a need to distance themselves from older natural history writings. Thus emphasis was on conducting new, clearly ecological studies rather than on trying to find older studies that contained useful observations for a new context.

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that early ecologists did not turn to Thoreau's writings for data or models. It was, instead, the nature writers who continued to find Thoreau valuable. Two of the most prominent nature writers of the period were John Muir and John Burroughs, both strongly influenced by Thoreau. Although Muir was amused by Thoreau's limited enthusiasm for the Maine wilderness, he was much more interested in Thoreau's outlook than in his scientific or backwoods expertise.³⁰ Burroughs, however, was deeply concerned with the relationship between nature writing and science, concern

which he expressed in both his attacks on "nature fakers"³¹ and in his evaluation of Thoreau. On the one hand, he praised Thoreau as being so superior to other nature writers as to make them seem "tame and insipid" in comparison, but on the other hand, in an effort to be evenhanded, he claimed that "when we regard Thoreau simply as an observer or as a natural historian, there have been better, though few so industrious and persistent. . . . He has added no new line, or touch to the portrait of bird or beast that I can recall—no important or significant fact to their lives. . . . He had not the detective eye of the great naturalist; he did not catch the clues and hints dropped here and there."³² This judgment now seems wrong, but in 1882 Burroughs was responding to what was in print of Thoreau's work, which included very little of the *Journal*—only the first of Blake's four volumes of seasonal extracts. Burroughs probably assumed that this was an adequate sampling of what was not yet published. However, his reassessment of Thoreau in 1922 does not seem very different on this point, although by then he had the whole of the 1906 *Journal* edited by Torrey and Allen to peruse. Apparently Burroughs saw nothing in it to change his negative opinion, which if anything was even stronger: "He did not have the philosophic mind, nor the scientific mind; he did not inquire into the reason of things, nor the meaning of things. . . . The scientific interpretation of things did not interest [Thoreau] at all."³³

Burroughs's evaluation was echoed by other commentators. In his Introduction to Thoreau's *Journal*, Torrey takes him to task for his lamentable ignorance of the most common birds: "even in his later entries [he] leaves the present-day reader wondering how so eager a scholar could have spent so many years in learning so comparatively little."³⁴ Odell Shepard prefaced his 1927 selection of *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals* with the comment that scientific observation had "overpowered" the poet in Thoreau, and his *Journal* records "a long struggle between the poet and the naturalist in him, and what looks like the poet's slow defeat."³⁵ In 1948, Joseph Wood Krutch published a particularly damning and widely circulated evaluation of Thoreau's interest in science: "The completely unsystematic, almost desperately pointless character of his own quasi-scientific recordings is evidence enough that he did not really grasp what slight philosophical implications the vast enterprise of collecting and cataloguing did have," showing that Thoreau thought science was no more than "the mere assembling of meaningless details."³⁶

Against such a background, it is all the more remarkable that some ecologists were taking a second look at Thoreau. In 1942, limnologist-ecologist Edward S. Deevey, Jr. decided to compare the limnology of Walden Pond to that of glacial lakes which he had studied in Connecticut. By then ecologists were no longer worried about their professional credentials, and he did not hesitate to consult Thoreau's *Walden*. Deevey realized that Thoreau's observations on both the lake and its life were carefully made and perceptive. Deevey also consulted Thoreau's *Journal* for additional relevant observations. In order to understand

why Thoreau's writings had nevertheless exerted no significant influence on the development of limnology and ecology, he also explored Thoreau's well-known ambivalence toward science. Deevey concluded that Thoreau ranks with the other gifted amateurs who occasionally made solid contributions to science, Sir Thomas Browne and W. H. Hudson; and that Thoreau made the first notable American contribution to the fundamentally ecological science of limnology.³⁷

Aldo Leopold may not have needed Deevey's encouragement before reading Thoreau's *Journal*, but he did adopt the same appreciative tone when, just five years later, he and Sara Elizabeth Jones called Thoreau "the father of phenology in this country."³⁸ These evaluations by such prominent ecologists as Deevey and Leopold must have encouraged others to read Thoreau from an ecological perspective. Soon after, Kathryn Whitford studied Thoreau's original investigations of forest succession, examining not only his 1860 address "The Succession of Forest Trees," but also observations in Thoreau's *Journal*. These writings convinced her that death had cut short Thoreau's genuine contributions to ecology, which had been overlooked and misunderstood because the observations which appeared "meaningless" to later commentators had not yet "found their places in subsequent lectures and writings"; furthermore, one must bear in mind that Thoreau "was working almost alone in this country. To a large extent he had to compile his own textbook in ecology."³⁹ Whitford easily persuaded her plant-ecologist husband to coauthor with her a general article, "Thoreau: Pioneer Ecologist and Conservationist" (1951). A minor flaw in their article is the claim that Thoreau had died without having read Darwin's *Origin of Species*.⁴⁰ but their main thrust was to present evidence to challenge the idea that Thoreau had been too ambivalent about science to make a positive contribution to ecology.

How much weight should be given to the judgment of a few ecologists in the face of contrary judgments from Thoreau scholars? Leo Stoller looked into Leopold and Jones's claim that Thoreau was "the father of phenology in this country," and refuted it by tracing the American interest in phenology back to Jefferson.⁴¹ In the same year, Charles Metzger argued both that Thoreau was fully scientific, and that he rejected science because of its limitations; although Metzger was more sympathetic to scientific perspectives, in the end he confirmed a sense of ambivalence about science.⁴² Some years later, in an extremely influential article, Nina Baym examined Thoreau's view of science and confirmed that Thoreau's obvious trend toward science was deeply undercut by his antiscientific bias, leading him in the end to turn "against his early pioneers" and go "back to his old naturalists, to whom 'gorgons and flying dragons were not incredible.'"⁴³ Thus Stoller, Metzger, and Baym were all impressed by Thoreau's apparent intellectual dilemma. The incompatibility between transcendental philosophy, poetry, and aesthetics versus scientific objectivity seemed to lead Thoreau into the mere compilation of a useless and purposeless mass of notes.

Before the publication of *The Dispersion of Seeds*, such a judgment seemed justified. In 1976, Egerton reluctantly agreed that Thoreau's place in

ecology was in the soon-to-be-outdated phenological tradition, and that Baym's interpretation was fundamentally accurate. Thoreau, it appeared, had attempted a synthesis between transcendentalism and science, but scientists' unwillingness to join him, and Thoreau's own inability to forge such a synthesis, led to his deep hostility to science even as he was making increasingly scientific observations. What was more, Thoreau's observations were within a conceptual framework that had to be overcome if ecology were to succeed as a science: "Where did phenology fit into the new science? Hardly at all. Phenology was one of the possibilities that naturalists seized as a basis for an ecological science, but it did not offer a rich enough program of investigation. Instead, therefore, ecology was founded upon phytogeography, limnology, and entomology. The secrets that eluded Thoreau were never discovered by anyone else."⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Thoreau's place in ecology was shortly to have a powerful advocate in Donald Worster, who made ambitious claims for Thoreau as an ecologist in his popular book on the origins and early history of ecology, *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (1977), which had three beautifully written chapters on Thoreau. Worster's approach offered a resolution to the conflict noticed by so many earlier commentators by defending the thesis that there are actually two traditions in ecology, both of which arose in the 1700s. "Arcadian" ecology, which he finds in the writings of the Anglican pastor Gilbert White, simply appreciates the intricate interlockings of nature and tries to bring human life into harmony with nature. On the other hand, "imperial" ecology, found in the writings of Carl Linnaeus and dating back to Francis Bacon, studies nature's interactions for the sake of controlling nature. In the mid-1800s these two founders were replaced respectively by Thoreau and Darwin, each of whom provided an important written legacy for the further development of these two ecologies down to the present.

This thesis seems to Egerton not to be supported by the evidence cited.⁴⁵ Ecology has, like all sciences, rival theories and methodologies, and at times some ecologists sneer at what other ecologists do, but they have always played in the same ballpark. Worster's ideas seem to come from outside ecology, and to reflect a broad range of tensions between science and larger culture endemic both to the nineteenth century and to our own day. For instance, a similar perspective is seen in Loren Eiseley, one of America's most prominent nature writers for several decades, and a likely source for Worster's dichotomy.⁴⁶ In his popular and well-known work *The Unexpected Universe* (1969), Eiseley contrasts the "grim" scientific and experimental tradition of Bacon with the "more gracious, humane tradition" of White and Thoreau. Eiseley also compares Thoreau and Darwin, although his chapter did not specifically concern ecology. Eiseley did find some positive things to say about Darwin, but his sympathies, like Worster's, were clearly against the reductive, pessimistic, and dominating science attributed to Darwin, as opposed to a gentler, more holistic and harmonious science attributed to Thoreau.⁴⁷

A related argument was advanced in 1981 by Walter Harding in his essay on "Walden's Man of Science," in which he also discussed Thoreau's writings in relation to the science of ecology. Rather confusingly, Harding tells us that "scientists have . . . tended to look rather scoffingly at Henry Thoreau," yet all the scientists whom he cites took Thoreau quite seriously: the Harvard ornithologist Ludlow Griscom, the Harvard botanist Richard J. Eaton, the Yale limnologist Edmund Deevey, the Wisconsin naturalist Aldo Leopold.⁴⁸ Harding's citations in this essay are quite brief and one must turn to his and Michael Meyer's *New Thoreau Handbook* (1980) to find more ample citations to the scholarly literature on which he drew.⁴⁹ Here it appears that the scoffers to whom Harding referred were scientists earlier in this century who were still concerned with establishing the credibility of ecology as a science. Harding seems not to have used the *Isis* bibliographies on the history of science, which would have opened a far wider range of material to him, including both Egerton's essay and Worster's book on the history of ecology.

Clearly the assumptions written into such an imperialist/Arcadian dichotomy have currency within our own day, for the dichotomy has in various forms achieved widespread acceptance. This could be seen as one manifestation of the continued hostility between the so-called "two cultures." The phrase was coined by C. P. Snow in 1959,⁵⁰ but the phenomenon traces back to nineteenth-century tensions quite relevant to Thoreau, tensions from which Worster draws to knit together his thesis. One was that between romantic, idealistic science and empirical science, seen on both sides of the Atlantic; the other was the tension between conservationists and preservationists, characteristic of America.

Thoreau's connection with romantic, idealistic science is well documented and requires little discussion here, beyond pointing out that recent work has somewhat complicated the picture. Thoreau's attention to the possibilities opened by detailed, empirical field research thrust him into the middle of a vigorous debate about proper methodology and the appropriate goals of science, a debate that can no longer be adequately understood by a simplistic opposition between humane, "romantic" and imperial, "positivist" science.⁵¹ The upshot is that Thoreau's work contains elements of both perspectives; and the same can be said for the differences between conservationists and preservationists. The perspectives, if not the terms, have been traced back to a conversation between Natty Bumppo and Judge Temple in James Fenimore Cooper's novel, *The Pioneers* (1823).⁵² Conservationists advocate wise use of resources, while preservationists advocate preservation of the natural environment. Thoreau in *The Dispersion of Seeds* discusses the wise use of forest resources, whereas elsewhere in his later work, particularly in the essay "Huckleberries" (edited from *Wild Fruits* by Leo Stoller), he emphasizes instead the "preserving" of forests and landforms as "a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation."⁵³ Clearly these perspectives need not be in opposition, since everyone acknowledges that some

lands have to be devoted to a harvesting of resources for humans to survive in their present numbers, while other lands, such as those in our modern national and state parks, can be retained in a relatively natural state. However, there is a tension in the implementation of these perspectives since there are often conflicts over the designation of particular pieces of land. But this tension never led to the emergence of different ecologies.⁵⁴

In his overview of "*Walden's Man of Science*," Harding judged that the writings by and about Thoreau which he consulted established Thoreau as "our first major American ecologist."⁵⁵ Whether or not this is true probably depends on one's criteria for this honor. If European travelers in America qualify, then certainly Alexander von Humboldt deserves the honor, though his observations were almost entirely confined to Latin America and Harding probably had in mind only America north of Mexico. Within North America, Pehr Kalm, the Scandinavian botanist and explorer, would have a good claim on the honor; but if one wanted to reserve it for an American citizen, then why not give it to America's premier naturalist of the eighteenth century, William Bartram?

One reason might be that, unlike Bartram, Thoreau lived during the time when American science was undergoing a slow professionalization, a process which saw the earliest formalizations of the science of ecology itself in the work of Humboldt and Darwin, scientists to whom Thoreau was deeply indebted. His own awareness of that process can be seen, for example, in his prickly defense of his amateur status when completing a questionnaire for the American Association for the Advancement of Science.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Thoreau's friends, including Emerson, generally viewed him as a capable naturalist. He was considered enough of a scientist for his colleagues to elect him, in 1850, to the Boston Society of Natural History, and to appoint him, in 1859, to the Harvard Visiting Committee in Natural History, "charged with the annual evaluation of the college curriculum."⁵⁷ Buried in the unpublished manuscripts of this "amateur" naturalist were observations and conclusions about limnology, plant geography, forest succession and seed dispersal that, if published, would likely have brought his work to the respectful attention of Darwin himself, and of Darwin's American ally, the botanist Asa Gray.

However, instead of seeing his studies linked with the theories of the mid-century's most advanced natural scientists, Thoreau was indeed left to invent the nascent science of ecology for himself. In the process he worked through some of his superficial complaints about the deadliness of science by discovering for himself that abstract scientific data, such as on the rate of tree growth and on the burial of acorns by squirrels, can have both practical implications and poetic import. The relationship of humans to such data need not be how we respond to them personally, but how such data can help us to manage our environment to prevent its degradation. Such concern is everywhere present in Thoreau's late essay "The Succession of Forest Trees" and the longer work from which it was

distilled, *The Dispersion of Seeds*. Having discovered how he could make science relevant to his own concerns, salvaging and protecting the damaged forests and fields of Concord, Thoreau realized that he need not make a choice between poetry and science. He could use science to nourish his poetic soul and also to protect the natural environment which he loved.

The new publication of Thoreau's hitherto-unpublished manuscripts, both *The Dispersion of Seeds* and the forthcoming *Wild Fruits*, thus changes the once-standard conclusion that Thoreau's hostility to science undercut his achievements in both poetry and in science. The first to sense the potential of Thoreau's work in science were not the established Thoreau scholars, who generally perpetuated the notion of a Thoreau trapped and undercut by hostility to science; instead, it was ecologists themselves, scientists who in mid-century turned to Thoreau's work from a fresh perspective. The figure who is emerging to view in the newly published manuscripts, and in the most recent critical studies of Thoreau, did after all find a way to ally poetry and science as one united whole, and in doing so moved beyond the old framework of phenology to pioneer the yet-unnamed science of ecology. Furthermore, this brief history of attitudes towards Thoreau's science suggests that ecological perspectives offer a way to close the old two-culture divide by bringing scientists, literary theorists, and historians into a common field. The definitive treatise on Thoreau and ecology remains to be written. Whoever does so will help rediscover new ground on which to bring poetry and science, passionate precision and inclusive vision, together.⁵⁸

Notes

- 1 Frank N. Egerton, "Ecological Studies and Observations before 1900," in *Issues and Ideas in America*, ed. Benjamin J. Taylor and Thurman J. White (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 311-51; reprinted in Frank N. Egerton, ed., *History of American Ecology* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 311-51.
- 2 A complete list of studies relevant to Thoreau and science would run to several pages. Studies relating specifically to Thoreau and ecology which were available to guide Egerton's discussion in 1976 include, in chronological order: Edward S. Deevey, Jr., "A Re-examination of Thoreau's *Walden*," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 17 (1942): 1-11; Kathryn Whitford, "Thoreau and the Woodlots of Concord," *New England Quarterly* 23 (1950): 291-306; Philip Whitford and Kathryn Whitford, "Thoreau: Pioneer Ecologist and Conservationist," *Scientific Monthly* 73 (1951): 291-96; Charles R. Metzger, "Thoreau on Science," *Annals of Science* 12 (1956): 206-11; Leo Stoller, "A Note on Thoreau's Place in the History of Phenology," *Isis* 47 (1956): 172-81; Stoller, *After Walden: Thoreau's Changing Views on Economic Man* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1957); Sherman Paul, *The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1958); Nina Baym, "Thoreau's View of Science," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26 (1965): 221-34; John Aldrich Christie,

Thoreau as World Traveler (New York: Columbia Univ. Press and American Geographical Society, 1965); Kichung Kim, "Thoreau's Science and Teleology," *ESQ* 18 (1972): 125-33; James McIntosh, *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance toward Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974).

Some notable recent studies after 1976 include, in chronological order: Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: The Roots of Ecology* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977; reprinted, New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); Robert Sattelmeyer, "Introduction" to *The Natural History Essays* by Henry David Thoreau (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1980), vii-xxxiv; Walter Harding, "Walden's Man of Science," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 57 (1981): 45-61; William Howarth, *The Book of Concord; Thoreau's Life as a Writer* (New York: Viking, 1982); Kurt Kehr, "Walden Three: Ecological Changes in the Landscape of Henry David Thoreau," *Journal of Forest History* 27 (Jan. 1983): 28-33; John Hildebidle, *Thoreau: A Naturalist's Liberty* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983); Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Henry David Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986); Gordon G. Whitney and William C. Davis, "From Primitive Woods to Cultivated Woodlots: Thoreau and the Forest History of Concord, Massachusetts," *Journal of Forest History* 30 (April 1986): 70-81; Richard J. Schneider, *Henry David Thoreau* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Joan Burbick, *Thoreau's Alternative History: Changing Perspectives on Nature, Culture, and Language* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); Stephen Adams and Donald Ross, Jr., *Revising Mythologies: The Composition of Thoreau's Major Works* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1988); William Rossi, "Roots, Leaves, and Method: Henry Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science," *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas* 19 (1988): 1-22; Robert Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading: A Study in Intellectual History with Bibliographical Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988); Robert D. Richardson, Jr., "Thoreau and Science," in *American Literature and Science*, ed. Robert J. Scholnick (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1992), 110-27; Richard Grusin, "Thoreau, Extravagance, and the Economy of Nature," *American Literary History* 5 (Spring 1993): 30-50; Gary Paul Nabhan, "Learning the Language of Fields and Forests," Foreword to *Faith in a Seed*, xi-xviii; Robert D. Richardson, Jr., "Thoreau's Broken Task," Introduction to *Faith in a Seed*, 3-17; William Rossi, "Thoreau as a Philosophical Naturalist-Writer," in *Thoreau's World and Ours: A Natural Legacy*, ed. Edmund A. Schofield and Robert C. Baron (Golden, Colo.: North American, 1993), 64-73; A. Hunter Dupree, "Thoreau as Scientist: American Science in the 1850s," in *Thoreau's World and Ours*, 42-47; Robert Sattelmeyer, "The Coleridgean Influence on Thoreau's Science," in *Thoreau's World and Ours*, 48-54; Laura Dassow Walls, "Seeing New Worlds: Thoreau and Humboldtian Science," in *Thoreau's World and Ours*, 55-63; Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995); Buell, "Thoreau and the Natural Environment," in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson (Cambridge [England]: New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 171-93; Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Thoreau's Later Natural History Writings," in *The Cambridge Companion*, 152-70; Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (Madison: Wisconsin Univ. Press, 1995); David M. Robinson, "Thoreau's 'Walking' and the

- Ecological Imperative," in *Approaches to Teaching Thoreau's Walden and Other Works*, ed. Richard J. Schneider (New York: MLA, 1996), 169-74; Michael Berger, "Henry David Thoreau's Science in *The Dispersion of Seeds*," *Annals of Science* 53 (July 1996): 381-97; Berger, "The Saunterer's Vision: Henry Thoreau's Epiphany of Forest Dynamics in *The Dispersion of Seeds*," *Concord Saunterer* n.s. 4 (Fall 1996): 45-71; Robert Kuhn McGregor, *A Wider View of the Universe: Henry Thoreau's Study of Nature* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1997). For further listings, see Walter Harding and Michael Meyer, *The New Thoreau Handbook* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1980), 152-54; also the extensive notes in Michael Berger, "The Saunterer's Vision."
- 3 Henry David Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed: The Dispersion of Seeds and Other Late Natural History Writings*, ed. Bradley P. Dean (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993).
 - 4 Frank N. Egerton, "The History and Present Entanglements of Some General Ecological Perspectives," in *Humans as Components of Ecosystems*, ed. Mark J. McDonald and S. T. A. Pickett (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993), 9-23. For a right-wing discussion of "ecology" primarily as a political and environmental movement, see Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989).
 - 5 Frank N. Egerton, "Changing Concepts of the Balance of Nature," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 48 (1973): 322-50.
 - 6 Carl Linnaeus, *Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Natural History, Husbandry, and Physic* (tr. by Benjamin Stillingfleet; Ed. 2, London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1762; reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1977); Egerton, "Ecological Studies," 338-39, 323.
 - 7 Egerton, "Ecological Studies," 318-19.
 - 8 Peter J. Bowler, *The Norton History of the Environmental Sciences* (New York: Norton, 1992, 1993), 205-11. See also Malcolm Nicolson, "Alexander von Humboldt, Humboldtian Science, and the Origins of the Study of Vegetation," *History of Science* 25 (1987): 167-94, and "Alexander von Humboldt and the Geography of Vegetation," in Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine, eds., *Romanticism and the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 169-85.
 - 9 Thoreau is known to have read Linnaeus, *Amoenitates academicae; seu dissertationes variae, physicae, medicae, botanicae. Antehac seorsim editae nunc collectae et auctae cum tabulis aeniis* (7 vols. Holmiae: [n.p.], 1749-69; *Select Dissertations from the Amoenitates Academica*, tr. F. J. Brand; London: G. Robinson and S. J. Robson, 1781, repr. New York: Arno Press, 1977); *Caroli Linnaei . . . Philosophia botanica, in qua explicantur fundamenta botanica cum definitionibus partium, exemplis terminorum, observationibus, rariorum, adjectis figuris aeniis. Edition altera* (Viennae Austriae: typis J. T. Trottnet, 1763); and *Lachesis lapponica; or, A tour of Lapland, now first published from the original manuscript journal of Linnaeus; by James Edward Smith* (London: White and Cochrane, 1811). See Robert Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading*, 223-24.
 - 10 Of Humboldt's works, Thoreau read *Cosmos: a Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (vols. 1-2, tr. E. C. Otté; London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849); *Views of Nature; or, Contemplations on the Sublime Phenomena of Creation* (tr. E. C. Otté and Henry G. Bohn; London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850); and *Personal Narrative of Travels to*

- the *Equinoctial Regions of America, during the Years 1799-1804* (tr. Thomasina Ross; 3 vols., London: H. G. Bohn, 1852). See Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading*, 206-7; Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*, 119-21, 267n.7, 267n.8.
- 11 Of Darwin's works, Thoreau read *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle Round the World, under the Command of Capt. Fitz Roy, R.N.* (2 vols; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1846); and *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York: D. Appleton, 1860, or London: John Murray, 1859). See Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading*, 162-63. On the significance of Darwin's *Journal* for Thoreau, see Christie, *Thoreau as World Traveler*, 74-81 *et passim*; Hildebidle, *A Naturalist's Liberty*, 40-47.
 - 12 Wilfrid Blunt, *The Compleat Naturalist: A Life of Linnaeus* (New York: Viking, 1971); Jean-Marc Drouin, *Réinventer la nature: L'écologie et son histoire* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 34-35 *et passim*; Sten Lindroth, "Carl Linnaeus (or von Linné)," *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1973), 8:374-81.
 - 13 Pehr Kalm, *Travels into North America; containing its natural history, and a circumstantial account of its plantations and agriculture in general, with the civil, ecclesiastical and commercial state of the country, the manners of the inhabitants, several curious and important remarks on various subjects. . . .* (tr. John Reinhold Forster; 3 vols., Warrington: William Eyres, 1770-71). See also Egerton, "Ecological Studies," 313-14.
 - 14 John Aldrich Christie, *Thoreau as World Traveler*; Frank N. Egerton, "Humboldt, Darwin, and Population," *Journal of the History of Biology* 3 (1970): 325-60; Laura Dassow Walls, "Seeing New Worlds: Thoreau and Humboldtian Science," and *Seeing New Worlds: Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science*.
 - 15 Henry David Thoreau, *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer, Edwin Moser, and Alexander C. Kern (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 3, with notes on 333-34.
 - 16 Thoreau, *Early Essays*, 26-36, with notes on 343-44; 26.
 - 17 Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading*, 205.
 - 18 Reprinted as vols. 5-8 in the Riverside edition of Thoreau's works: *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, 11 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893-94).
 - 19 *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (14 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906); reprinted in 2 vols. with Foreword by Walter Harding (New York: Dover, 1962); Harding identifies two omissions in his Foreword to the two-volume Dover reprint.
 - 20 Thoreau, *Journal*, various editors (5 vols. to date; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981-).
 - 21 Sharon Cameron, *Writing Nature: Henry Thoreau's Journal* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), ch. 1.
 - 22 Thoreau, *Journal* [Princeton edition], 4:296; January 27, 1852.
 - 23 Reprinted in *Natural History Essays*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer, 72-92.
 - 24 *Faith in a Seed*; for the relationship between the 1860 address and *The Dispersion of Seeds*, see Hildebidle, *Thoreau: A Naturalist's Liberty*, 62-66, 70.
 - 25 For a powerful and detailed new interpretation of Thoreau's ecological science in these late works, and of the ways in which Thoreau's new approach shows how

- "science and literature can cooperate, serve, and correct each other," see Michael Berger, "Henry David Thoreau's Science in *The Dispersion of Seeds*" and "The Saunterer's Vision: Henry Thoreau's Epiphany of Forest Dynamics in *The Dispersion of Seeds*," 52.
- 26 *Wild Fruits* is partly reprinted by Dean in *Faith in a Seed*, 177-203. Dean is currently editing the full text of *Wild Fruits* for publication (New York: Norton, forthcoming). Hildebidle argues that Thoreau's later writings in general are less dominated by his personality than are his earlier writings; see *Thoreau: A Naturalist's Liberty*, 62-66, 70.
 - 27 Thoreau, *Journal*, June 1851; see 1906 edition, 2:228, 240-48, 261-64; Princeton edition, 3:244-45, 253-59, 269-71.
 - 28 Egerton, "Ecological Studies," 339.
 - 29 Frank N. Egerton, "The History of Ecology: Achievements and Opportunities, Parts I and II" (*Journal of the History of Biology* 16 [1983]: 259-311; 18 [1985]: 103-43); Robert P. McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology: Concept and Theory* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), ch. 1-2.
 - 30 James M. Clarke, *The Life and Adventures of John Muir* (n.p.: The Word Shop, 1979), 272; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3d ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), ch. 1-2.
 - 31 Burroughs mistakenly placed Ernest Thompson Seton in this category until Seton produced field notes to support his writings. Betty Keller, *Black Wolf: The Life of Ernest Thompson Seton* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984), 153-59. See also Edward J. Renahan, Jr., *John Burroughs: An American Naturalist* (Post Mills, Vermont: Chelsea Green, 1992), 331-33.
 - 32 John Burroughs, "Henry D. Thoreau," *Century Magazine* n.s. 2 (1882): 368-79; 377-78.
 - 33 John Burroughs, *The Last Harvest* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 122.
 - 34 Bradford Torrey, "Introduction," *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, 1:xlili.
 - 35 Odell Shephard, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), ix; quoted in Kathryn Whitford, "Thoreau and the Woodlots of Concord," *New England Quarterly*, 23 (1950): 291-306, 292.
 - 36 Joseph Wood Krutch, *Henry David Thoreau* (1948; New York: William Morrow, 1974), 182.
 - 37 Edward S. Deevey, Jr., "A Re-examination of Thoreau's *Walden*," 10.
 - 38 Aldo Leopold and Sara Elizabeth Jones, "A Phenological Record of Sauk and Dane Counties, Wisconsin, 1935-1945," *Ecological Monographs* 17 (1947): 81-122, 83.
 - 39 Whitford, "Thoreau and the Woodlots of Concord," 306.
 - 40 Philip Whitford and Kathryn Whitford, "Thoreau: Pioneer Ecologist and Conservationist," *Scientific Monthly* 73 (1951): 291-96, 291.
 - 41 Leo Stoller, "A Note on Thoreau's Place in the History of Phenology."
 - 42 Charles R. Metzger, "Thoreau on Science."
 - 43 Nina Baym, "Thoreau's View of Science," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26 (1965): 221-34, 221, 234.
 - 44 Egerton, "Ecological Studies," 331, 332.
 - 45 See Frank N. Egerton, Rev. of Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy*, *Isis* 70 (1979): 167-68.

- 46 See Andrew J. Angyal, *Loren Eiseley* (Boston: Twayne, 1983); Ervin F. Carlisle, *Loren Eiseley: The Development of a Writer* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1983).
- 47 Loren Eiseley, *The Unexpected Universe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969), ch. 6.
- 48 In addition to other works already cited, see Ludlow Griscom, *Birds of Concord: A Study in Population Trends* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949); Richard J. Eaton, *A Flora of Concord: an account of the flowering plants, ferns, and fern-allies known to have occurred without cultivation in Concord, Massachusetts from Thoreau's time to the present day* (Cambridge: Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, 1974).
- 49 Walter Harding, "Walden's Man of Science," 45-46; Walter Harding and Michael Meyer, *The New Thoreau Handbook*, 152-54.
- 50 C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and a Second Look* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959, 1964).
- 51 In addition to sources already cited, see William Rossi, "Roots, Leaves, and Method: Henry Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science," and "Thoreau as Philosophical Naturalist-Writer" (*Thoreau's World and Ours*, 64-73); also Robert Sattelmeyer, "The Coleridgean Influence on Thoreau's Science" (*Thoreau's World and Ours*, 48-54); Sattelmeyer and Richard A. Hocks, "Thoreau and Coleridge's *Theory of Life*," *Studies in the American Renaissance, 1985*, ed. Joel Myerson (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1985), 269-84; and Walls's response in *Seeing New Worlds*, particularly ch. 2 and 119-21.
- 52 Nelson Van Valen, "James Fenimore Cooper and the Conservation Schism," *New York History* 62 (1981): 289-306.
- 53 Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed*, 170-73; *Natural History Essays*, 259.
- 54 For a recent discussion of ecology and the environmental movement, including a nuanced discussion of the various positions taken by ecologists, see Peter Bowler, *The Norton History of Environmental Sciences*, ch. 11-12.
- 55 Harding, "Walden's Man of Science," 56.
- 56 Thoreau, *Journal* [Princeton edition], 5:469-70; March 5, 1853.
- 57 See Richardson, "Thoreau and Science," 123.
- 58 Whoever undertakes the definitive treatise on Thoreau and ecology will want to use the valuable guides to Thoreau's travels by Robert F. Stowell and William L. Howarth (*A Thoreau Gazetteer*; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970); to his plant names by Ray Angelo (*Botanical Index to the Journal of Henry David Thoreau*; Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1984); and to his Concord birds by Griscom (note 48). Studies on the ecology of the Concord and Walden Pond areas in *Thoreau's Legacy and Ours* provide additional background for such a treatise.



Seasons Blending
Waterlow Park, North London
Photo by Madeleine Minson

In Search of Spring and Fall: Anticipation of Seasons in Thoreau's Journal

Madeleine Minson

May 10th 52

This monday [sic] the streets are full of cattle being driven up country cows & calves—and colts. The rain is making the grass grow apace— It appears to stand upright—its blades and you can almost see it grow. For some reason I now remember the autumn—the succory & the golden-rod. We remember autumn to best advantage in the spring—the finest aroma of it reaches us then.¹

Thoreau's ever more empirical interest in natural detail during the 1850s went hand in hand with an impassioned and rapidly expanding interest in every aspect of the seasons; their promise, arrival, peak and maturity as well as their weather-ruled daily variations. Although much of this journal material amounts to little more than straightforward recording of seasonal phenomena in line with naturalist tradition, a significant part of Thoreau's observations has a far deeper resonance. I am thinking in particular of his habit of anticipating each season long in advance, or indeed of looking back to seasons past, memory and anticipation blending in the dream of the ideal other. With a highly emotional kind of restlessness, triggered by the sights and sounds of particular phenomena in nature, Thoreau is ever-ready to stray in thought from the season at hand. Perhaps the essence of a season is best caught in its absence; why else would "We remember autumn to best advantage in the spring," as he put it in May 1852? A gleam from the dark side of the year is often far more potent than any present season, however bright, and such gleams keep overtaking Thoreau, especially during the mid-1850s. While discussing Thoreau's life in 1852 in *The Shores of America*, Sherman Paul notes his tendency to anticipate a season long before it happens (any season, that is, not just the predictable spring): "Just as Thoreau had looked with increasing eagerness for the signs of spring in winter, so now, by July, he was looking for the signs of autumn in summer."² H. Daniel Peck also draws attention

to this habit in his discussion of Thoreau's observation of "first facts" of the seasons and his "restructuring" of the calendar year in chapter four of *Thoreau's Morning Work*, but neither Paul nor Peck investigates in detail the rich implications of Thoreau's seasonal anticipation. I would suggest that such an investigation is vital for an understanding of the mid-1850s journal and that it has much to tell us about the volatile and complex nature of Thoreau's optimism in general. By tracing the life of nature as it unfolds in the space between the present and the future, Thoreau simultaneously locates his own life in the fertile ground between contentment and discontent, or indeed between acceptance and hope, feeding, I think, off both.

Thoreau's inclination to anticipate, to lift himself if ever so slightly from the here and now, is in some ways at odds with his emphatic longing to live in the present. This urge is forcefully expressed in *Walden*, which was approaching its final form during this period and is strewn with statements about the importance of realizing the beauty of the world at hand:

Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us.³

There is little sign of Thoreau's impatience with the present in a passage such as this (except perhaps in his longing for it to be lived at a near unobtainable peak of intensity), and *Walden* is rich in comments of this kind; comments which locate the available moment as the very apex of dreams. In "Spring" for example, Thoreau emphasizes this moment's value in a similar way, using imagery of the seasons to bring home his point: "We should be blessed if we lived in the present always, and took advantage of every accident that befell us, like the grass which confesses the influence of the slightest dew that falls on it. . . . We loiter in winter while it is already spring" (*Walden*, 314). Although Thoreau's affirmation of the present finds eloquent expression in *Walden* passages such as these, they still amount to rhetorical statements of aim and intent rather than records of his actual experiences. For such a record we have to look to the journal, a much more immediate (as less drafted and processed) text, untainted by the pressures of publication. Granting him the space to describe the cycle of the seasons and his own evolving life at his leisure, the journal gradually emerged as Thoreau's main vehicle of expression, well suited to his 1850s ambitions, and indeed enabling them in a crucial way. In the all-embracing journal, celebration of the present takes concrete form in the description of intensely experienced moments, instances of rare

beauty which are all the more striking because they are surrounded by material of a plainer kind. In these moments, Thoreau tends to feel quietly attuned to nature and contented with just being, if still not quite beyond restlessness, as I will show.

One such moment (among many) occurs in Thoreau's account of an evening on the river in June 1852. There is nothing particularly grand or unusual about this evening's experience, and his intention with the entry seems to be quite simply to preserve an impression of it, caught by the angular strokes of a rather random set of sentences. The sustained use of the present tense creates a (more or less trustworthy) sense of immediacy:

It is candlelight, the fishes leap— The meadows sparkle with the coppery light of fire-flies. The evening star multiplied by undulating water is like bright sparks of fire continually ascending. The reflections of the trees are grandly indistinct. There is a low mist slightly enlarging the river—through which the arches of the stone bridge are just visible—as a vision. The mist is singularly bounded—collected here—while there is none there—close up to the bridge on one side & none on the other—depending apparently on currents of air. A dew in the air it is—which in time will wet you through. See stars reflected in the bottom of our boat it being 1/4 full of water.

There is a low crescent of Northern light.— & shooting stars from time to time—(we go only from Channings to the ash above the RR.) I paddle with a bough the Nile boatman's oar—which is rightly pliant & you do not labor much. Some dogs bay. A sultry night. (*Journal 5*, 101-2)

There is a curious tension between impulses towards objectivity and imaginative transformation in this apparently unified passage. The initial matter-of-fact statements are swept aside by the extravagant image of the continually ascending sparks of the evening star and the mistily sublime river impressions which follow ("as a vision"), only to be reintroduced by the highly rational comments about the exact cause of the location of the mist (and indeed of stars being reflected in the bottom of the boat, "it being a quarter full of water"). If the objective voice used here denotes enlightened interest in the moment and thus a willingness to accept it as it is, the concurrent creative transformation of it indicates a degree of dissatisfaction; an urge to make the present seem different and more splendid.⁴

Thoreau's journal descriptions of moments of deep involvement with the present are often affected by a creative restlessness which transports him far from the current time and place, and his statements of explicit impatience with the present season provide a way of articulating this discontent. The seasonal material in the journal often suggests longing for something other than the present: its firm emphasis on anticipation is sharply at odds with the dream of being satisfied with the day at hand. In the middle of a hot and dry July 1854, in which "Plants are curled and withered" and "leaves dry, ripe like the berries," Thoreau complains

that "The season is trivial as noon,"⁵ implying in unambiguous terms (and in this case with good reason) that he is longing for release. Thoreau often finds summer, a season of relative stasis, especially difficult to be satisfied with, looking for signs of fall at least from the start of July. During the summer of 1852 he begins to formulate a theory to explain his weariness with this time of the year, writing at the beginning of August about the way the year grows old after a certain point, which he locates midway through the summer when our attention tends to shift to the following season: "Methinks we do ourselves at any rate some what tire of the season—& observe less attentively and with less interest the opening of new flowers—and the song of the birds— It is the signs of the fall that affect us most. It is hard to live in the summer content with it" (*Journal* 5, 282). Familiarity can quite naturally dampen interest, but Thoreau's problem with contentment does not depend only on the appearance of the season at hand. It springs at least partly from the fact that the thrill of imagining an absent season is often much greater than that of loving the present one, as indeed the thought of the ideal so easily overshadows the actual. Thoreau implies as much both in the above passage and when he is intrigued by the subtle ways in which the excitement of memory works while studying the evidence of spring in April 1854: "In the brook there is the least possible springing yet. A little yellow lily in the ditch and sweet flag *starting* in the brook. I was sitting on the rail over the brook, when I heard something which reminded me of the song of the robin in rainy days in past springs. Why is it that not the note itself, but something which reminds me of it, should affect me most? — the ideal instead of the actual" (*Journal* VI, 182). This suggestive sound readily revitalizes the alluring space between the experienced and the expected, preparing him for further life by making him more receptive to the past.

In early January 1853, midwinter of the year, the examination of a crowfoot bud leads to an impassioned (and even religiously reverential) entry which catches the excitement of anticipation as such, and over and beyond that, of anticipation as hope. No contentment could equal the fairness and resonance of the promise this flower holds, still tightly folded up among its unexpanded leaves:

The leaves of the crowfoot also are quite green & carry me forward to spring. I dig one up with a stick, and pulling it to pieces I find deep in the centre of the plant just beneath the ground—surrounded by all the tender leaves that are to precede it—the blossom bud about half as big as the head of a pin—perfectly white (?)— I open one next day & it is *yellow* There it patiently sits—or slumbers how full of faith—informed of a spring which the world has never seen—the promise & prophesy of it shaped some-what like some eastern temples in which a bud shaped dome o'er tops the whole—it affected me this tender dome like bud, within the bosom of the earth—like a temple upon the earth—resounding with the worship of votaries— Methought I saw the priests in yellow robes within it.

The crowfoot buds—And how many beside!—lie unexpanded just beneath the surface. May I lead my life the following year as innocently as they— May it be as fair and smell as sweet. I anticipate nature. Destined to become a fair yellow flower above the surface to delight the eyes of children & its maker. (*Journal* 5, 438-39)

The step from objective examination to promise-laden play is here short indeed. A tiny bud such as this naturally leads the thoughts to spring, but Thoreau reinvigorates this well-worn symbol by his carefully worked out comparison of it to an Eastern temple, complete with yellow-robed votaries. The sheer rhapsodic energy this bud-centered dream induces gives an idea of the power the very smallest triggers of anticipation have over Thoreau. They are readily capable of renovating his mind and making it blossom in an instant, thrilled into life by the suggestion of a future.

In this context, the actual arrival of spring is almost irrelevant, more likely to pale the heat of promise than bring about its realization. As Thoreau puts it after a lengthy passage concerned with spring happening (which takes the usual form of noting the opening of flowers) in May 1854:

We soon get through with Nature. She excites an expectation she cannot satisfy. The merest child which has rambled into a copsewood dreams of a wilderness so wild and strange and inexhaustible as Nature can never show him. . . . That forest on whose skirts the red-bird flits is not of earth. I expected a fauna more infinite and various, birds of more dazzling colors and more celestial song. How many springs shall I continue to see the common sucker (*Catostomus Bostoniensis*) floating dead on our river! (*Journal* VI, 293-94)

Tracing the arrival of spring here goes hand in hand with an acute awareness of the unlikelihood that spring-induced hopes will find satisfaction. The image of the dead suckers, the inclusion of their Latin name locating them firmly as part of the “ordinary,” empirically knowable world, effectively brings home the contrast between Thoreau’s surroundings and the splendid landscape of his dreams. In light of the fact that he so successfully made it his mission to know and appreciate the world around him, his disenchantment with his environment is perhaps unexpectedly severe, but the sentiment is by no means unusual in the journal; Thoreau’s love of the near and close was suffused with impatience. With one eye on the ground and the other bound for the stars, Thoreau was well and truly divided, at least part of his heart aching for a beauty no earthly prospects could muster. The beauty at hand might only remind him of what he is missing, as in this entry from October 1850 in which the sight of a sacredly golden-lit pine grove fails to stop his mind from straying from it: “Looking through a stately pine-grove I saw the western sun falling in golden streams through its aisles— Its west side opposite to

me was all lit up with golden light; but what was I to it?— Such sights remind me of houses which we never inhabit.— that commonly I am not at home in the world. I see somewhat fairer than I enjoy or possess[.]”⁶ Seeing “somewhat fairer” than he enjoys or possesses, Thoreau’s vision not only departs from the actual landscape but actively creates its own world, often (if perhaps not in this instance) a few degrees warmer and more hopeful than there is good reason or grounding for. There is thus an acute mismatch between his interpretation and the scene at hand; a chasm opens on the encounter with beauty or other signs of promise.⁷

Thoreau’s dreamy otherworldliness is often activated by the same kind of triggers which lead him to think of other seasons. All kinds of sensory impression affect him but few more potently than sounds; music, bird song, the sound of crickets and of his much beloved telegraph harp.⁸ These readily induce a sense of infinity or transcendence, directing him away from the actual with unparalleled force. In August 1852 for example, the sound of distant piano music completely transforms his surroundings, a transformation figured (parodically or not) by the use of chivalric imagery: “A thrumming of piano strings beyond the gardens & through the elms—at length the melody steals into my being—. . . This is no longer the dull earth on which I stood— It is possible to live a grander life here—already the steed is stamping—the knights are prancing— Already our thoughts bid a proud farewell to the so-called actual life & its humble glories—” (*Journal* 5, 272). In a rapturous longer passage on sounds in general in December 1853, Thoreau describes how they remind him of his immortality and even liberate him from his body and its surroundings: “I get the value of the earth’s extent and the sky’s depth. . . . I leave my body in a trance and accompany the zephyr and the fragrance” (*Journal* VI, 40). At other times he considers such release from the actual in temporal terms, as a liberation from the present season and perhaps even from time itself. In May 1853 and 1854, the sound of crickets transports him rapidly through the seasons to come, towards infinity. On May 15, 1853, he writes: “With this elixir I see clear through the summer now to autumn, and any summer work seems frivolous. . . . At one leap I go from the just opened buttercup to the life-everlasting. This singer has antedated autumn. His strain is superior (inferior?) to seasons. It annihilates time and space; the summer is for time-servers” (*Journal* V, 158). This is anticipation of seasons at its most ecstatically extreme, its vertiginous associations summed up by the description of the shift “from the just opened buttercup to the life-everlasting”; a shift straight out of time. Thoreau’s thoughts on the crickets in May 1854 are uncannily similar, picking up the thread where he left it the previous year by stressing the timelessness of their sound. The song of a cricket now “suggests a wisdom mature, never late, being above all temporal considerations, which possesses the coolness and maturity of autumn amidst the aspiration of spring and the heats of summer” (*Journal* VI, 290); Thoreau remains consistent in his response. This consistency, moreover, is central to his anticipation of seasons in general, which is subject to a

good deal of repetition and orderly thinking and vitally dependent on the gradual accumulation of knowledge. Thoreau needed to know nature intimately to be able to inhabit the evolving year in any true sense.

His entries on the seasons directly reflect the need for this deep knowledge, frequently comparing this year's observations with those of former years. There would indeed be no anticipation without memory as we can only know what we are seeking through our knowledge of the past, previous experience serving as the mold for future expectation.⁹ Thoreau's anticipations of seasons are movements simultaneously back and forward in thought, sometimes explicitly so as in this comment on the catnep in May 1852: "There is something in its fragrance as soothing as balm to a sick man. It *advances me* even to the autumn and beyond it. How full of *reminiscence* is any fragrance—" (*Journal* 5, 39; my emphasis). Advanced by a reminiscence, Thoreau shuttles between the known and the unknown, his premonition of autumn sparked somewhere in the interval between them. Many of his anticipation entries testify to this double bind, most often rather subtly through the inclusion of words such as "reminds" or "reminiscence" in a forward-looking context (for example, "The sight of the masses of yellow hastate leaves and flower-buds of the yellow lily, already four or six inches long, at the bottom of the river, *reminds* me that nature is prepared for an infinity of springs yet" [*Journal* VII, 71; my emphasis]).¹⁰ Some entries even make the distinction between past and future seem irrelevant, as when Thoreau contemplates pitcher-plant leaves in March "whose fragrance when bruised" carries him "back or forward to an incredible season" (*Journal* VI, 149). Neither the destination nor the way there really matters here and the general vagueness of the passage all the more effectively conveys the excitement of the moment of transport.

The most notable thing about Thoreau's anticipation of seasons is perhaps his sheer devotion to the practice in the mid-1850s; the fact that he is so likely to be moved by intimations of the absent during these years. He is continually energized by these small encounters, as with buds in autumn which lead his mind to spring even more powerfully than when they are actually expected. In autumn 1853, Thoreau frequently notices such unusually early budding. As soon as the last leaves have fallen, renewal is ready and waiting: "Now that the leaves are off, I begin to notice the buds of various forms and color and more or less conspicuous, prepared for another season, —partly, too, perhaps, for food for birds" (*Journal* V, 455 [October 26]). And a few days later even leafing is seen to occur, a phenomenon he describes as both extraordinary and familiar; it anticipates nature in a wonderful but also regular way, exactly as he knows it did last year: "While getting the azaleas, I notice the shad-bush conspicuously leafing out. Those long, narrow, pointed buds, prepared for next spring, have anticipated their time. I noticed something similar when surveying the Hunt wood-lot last winter. Remember in this connection that at one period last spring this bud appeared the most forward" (*Journal* V, 471). When searching for evidence of still distant renewal,

Thoreau tends to be both sober and expectant in this way, equally involved with the minutiae of the present and the rapid flow of the seasons, the promise to come.

Some of the associations which transport him to far-off seasons are more subtle than buds and leafing, which are almost synonymous with spring. Summer can be lodged in a sudden scent, encountered on the off-chance in the frozen depths of February: "When I break off a twig of green-barked sassafras as I am going through the woods now—& smell it, I am startled to find it fragrant as in summer— It is an importation of all the species of oriental summers into our New England winter. Very foreign to the snow & the oak leaves" (*Journal* 4, 339). Similarly, the palest touch of colour seen against a background of snow can trigger a sudden flash of summer, all the more potent because of its rareness, as in January 1854: "Nature is now gone into her winter palace. The trunks of the pines, greened with lichens, are now more distinct by contrast. Even the pale yellowish green of lichens speaks to us at this season, reminding us of summer" (*Journal* VI, 63). Perhaps summer, or indeed any season, is always present somewhere inside us, burning with a small light and ready to burst into full flame at the slightest hint as in the above example. Thoreau suggests as much in January 1855 when he comments on the overpowering force the recollection of summer can have in winter: "Perhaps what most moves us in winter is some reminiscence of far-off summer. How we leap by the side of the open brooks! What beauty in the running brooks! What life! What society! The cold is merely superficial; it is summer still at the core, far, far within" (*Journal* VII, 112). Stirred by memory and anticipation, the inner season readily eclipses and even overthrows the outer season; thinking of summer, Thoreau suddenly *is* in summer even if it is January outside. The season he experiences is thus to some extent a subjective matter, which is open to manipulation at will.

A glance at the most common kind of seasonal anticipation in the journal, anticipation of the following season, reveals how early Thoreau begins to look ahead and how consistent this practice is, applied to all four seasons alike. In 1854, a year keenly devoted to the study of the seasons and about three years into Thoreau's dedicated mapping of seasonal progress, he already starts to think about spring in January, three months before it is due. The first spring anticipation occurs on the thirteenth when a persistent thaw brings associations of a warmer season: "Still warm and thawing, springlike; no freezing in the night, though high winds. . . . Even the telegraph harp seems to sound with a vernal sound, heralding the new year" (*Journal* VI, 65). The first anticipation of summer, which rapidly deepens into a summer memory, is recorded on April 6, again well before the season is pending: "This susurrus [of honey bees] carries me forward some months toward summer. I was reminded *before* of those still warm summer noons when the breams' nests are left dry, and the fishes retreat from the shallows into the cooler depths, and the cows stand up to their bellies in the river. The reminiscence came over me like a summer's dream" (*Journal* VI, 186, Thoreau's emphasis).

In a similar way, Thoreau glances at autumn when summer has barely started. On May 26, the rapid growth of the rye leads his thoughts to seasonal cycles in general and autumn in particular: "It makes the revolution of the seasons seem a rapid whirl. How quickly and densely it clothes the earth! Thus early it suggests harvest and fall" (*Journal VI*, 303). Before the beginning of June, Thoreau's anticipation has thus already become focused on autumn, off on a path of foretelling which is ever-bound for the future. Thus, when autumn actually arrives at the beginning of September, his thoughts gradually shift to winter. On the twelfth, the cold weather both energizes him and makes him think of providing for the following season, leading him to anticipate winter if ever so slightly: "This is a *cold* evening with a white twilight, and threatens frost, the first in *these respects* decidedly autumnal evening. It makes us think of wood for the winter. For a week or so the evenings have been sensibly longer, and I am beginning to throw off my summer idleness. This twilight is succeeded by a brighter starlight than heretofore" (*Journal VII*, 34; Thoreau's emphasis). Coming full circle, the first spring anticipation in 1855 occurs with due regularity in early January. Just like last year, spring promise is triggered by a certain warmth in the air: "The delicious soft, spring-suggesting air, —how it fills my veins with life! Life becomes again credible to me. A certain dormant life awakes in me, and I begin to love nature again. Here is my Italy, my heaven, my New England" (*Journal VII*, 104-5). This list could be continued throughout the year and indeed the years before and after. Judging by the abundant evidence of anticipation in the journal around this time, Thoreau barely pauses to take in the imminent quarter of the year (which he of course also does, in its multiplicity of detail) before shifting his attention to the next.

It is in some ways perfectly common practice to look for signs of the next season, at least in winter and spring, evidence of little other than a natural interest in the renewal of the year. However, Thoreau's habit of looking forward has more far-reaching implications than this. It can easily be regarded as a testimony to his optimism; the sign of a life lived continually on the borders of promise, reaching out for the future, simultaneously associated with and dissociated from the present. For Thoreau, this mode of life soon becomes a self-perpetuating practice; once he is fully devoted to it, by the beginning of the 1850s, his devotion just grows, leading him to repeat his cycles of observation from year to year. All seasons are eagerly expected in the journal but spring and autumn in particular, and most of all spring, which Thoreau invariably predicts and records in exhaustive detail, perhaps preferring it in a commonplace way.¹¹ As he puts it in a statement that his autumn life readily contradicts, "We observe attentively the first beautiful days in spring, but not so much in autumn" (*Journal V*, 382).¹² In late winter we are certainly more naturally inclined to look ahead; it is a time which is especially conducive to anticipation: "At the end of winter there is a season in which we are daily expecting spring, and finally a day when it arrives" (*Journal V*, 13). In the early and mid-1850s, Thoreau often refers to such a season of near-inevitable

anticipation as soon as the new year is under way; sometime in January or February. True to his fascination with the future during this period, his thoughts eagerly rush ahead of the year to spring.

Thoreau's insistent spring anticipation is often matched by a recurring sense of belatedness and decline from about July onwards: a tinge of despondency arrives with the notion of fall. As he puts it in 1854, elaborating his theory of two halves of the year¹³: "The fall, in fact, begins with the first heats of July. . . . It is one long acclivity from winter to midsummer and another long declivity from midsummer to winter" (*Journal VI*, 421). Or with a rather more ominous emphasis, in July 1852: "Do not all flowers that blossom after mid. July remind us of the fall? After midsummer we have a belated feeling as if we had all been idlers—& are forward to see in each sight—& hear in each sound some presage of the fall.—just as in mid. age man anticipates the end of life" (*Journal V*, 266). But there is an excitement inherent in the anticipation of autumnal lateness too, an excitement rather different in kind from that of expectation in spring. When the sound of crickets brings a reminder of autumn in July, Thoreau's reaction is one of exhilaration and sharpened senses: "How apt we are to be reminded of lateness, even before the year is half spent! Such little objects check the diffuse tide of our thoughts and bring it to a head, which thrills us" (*Journal V*, 336). This alertness, sparked into life by the suggestion of seasonal difference, is however tinged, if ever so subtly, by the melancholy associated with anticipating a season of decline.

Considered from the perspective of autumn, the signs of oncoming seasons may thus be read as markers of the brevity of the year and life drawing to its close rather than as signs of hope and progress. Each act of anticipation points towards death as well as further life, rushing a process which is short enough as it is. "The year is full of warnings of its shortness, as is life," Thoreau writes in August 1853, feeling the weight of impending darkness while considering the meaning of the sense of lateness which has come over him: "The sound of so many insects and the sight of so many flowers affect us so,—the creak of a cricket and the sight of the prunella and autumnal dandelion. They say, 'For the night cometh in which no man may work'" (*Journal V*, 379). The following year, Thoreau locates the sadness inherent in the turning of the year more precisely than in transience in general; it is in the sudden realization that spring-stirred promise might not find satisfaction this year either. As early as June 17, the hopes of the year seem to be fading: "The season of hope and promise is past; already the season of small fruits has arrived. . . . We are a little saddened, because we begin to see the interval between our hopes and their fulfilment" (*Journal VI*, 363). At the end of July, Thoreau reiterates this sentiment, emphasizing his sense of discrepancy between hope and attainment: "Methinks the season culminated about the middle of this month,—that the year was of indefinite promise before, but that, after the first intense heats, we postponed the fulfillment [sic] of many of our hopes for this year" (*Journal VI*, 413). It is perhaps only by renewing the

dream of renewal, which Thoreau readily does by dreaming of another spring soaked in promise, that the dense shades which have become associated with forward-looking can be cleared away, making anticipation again seem attractive.

Thoreau's sensitivity to the prospect of autumn closing in, already arresting the expansion of his heart in mid-summer, indicates how acutely affectable he is by seasonal or other variations in his surroundings. As he puts it, "Our moods vary from week to week with the winds & the temperature—& the revolution of the seasons" (*Journal* 5, 49). Thoreau's connection to the landscape in later life is startling and vital, external rain or sunshine reaching deep into his soul at all times of the year. Sufficient time—or with the words of *Walden*, "leisure and opportunity to see the spring come in" (302)—is essential if this close interchange with nature shall work in a fruitful and creative way. Thoreau is often acutely anxious about missing the event of a new season, fending off distractions as best he can. On May 19, 1852, he reflects on how far he has succeeded in this during the present spring: "Up to about the 14th of May I watched the progress of the season very closely—though not so carefully the earliest birds—but since that date both from poor health & multiplicity of objects I have note [sic] little but what fell under my observation" (*Journal* 5, 67). In September 1854 he eloquently sums up the benefits of having the time and freedom to observe in a statement that could readily serve as a credo for his way of life in the 1850s:

Thinking this afternoon of the prospect of my writing lectures and going abroad to read them the next winter, I realized how incomparably great the advantages of obscurity and poverty which I have enjoyed so long (and may still perhaps enjoy). I thought with what more than princely, with what poetical, leisure I had spent my years hitherto, without care or engagement, fancy-free. I have given myself up to nature; I have lived so many springs and summers and autumns and winters as if I had nothing else to do but *live* them, and imbibe whatever nutriment they had for me; I have spent a couple of years, for instance, with the flowers chiefly, having none other so binding engagement as to observe when they opened. . . . Ah, how I have thriven on solitude and poverty! I cannot overstate this advantage. . . . If I go abroad lecturing, how shall I ever recover the lost winter? (*Journal* VII, 46)

Ironically enough, Thoreau does give up the next few months to writing and lecturing, thus missing the arrival of winter.¹⁴ On December 8 he comments on this loss: "Winter has come unnoticed by me, I have been so busy writing. This is the life most lead in respect to Nature. How different from my habitual one! It is hasty, coarse, and trivial, as if you were a spindle in a factory. The other is leisurely, fine, and glorious, like a flower" (*Journal* VII, 80). The life Thoreau laments missing here is not necessarily a life of anticipation but it is certainly a life of attention to the progress of the year, and in particular to that crucial point where a season takes hold and turns into reality, wrecking or fulfilling dreams in the process.

To Thoreau, the arrival of spring or any season remains a beautiful mystery no matter how much he studies it, ever-new and elusive in its capacity to surprise and demand attention. Its seemingly obvious signs, such as newly opened flowers, can be noted over and over again in the journal; Thoreau's record of them speaks clearly of a mind that does not weary of its self-appointed task. "What is the earliest sign of spring," Thoreau would ask in March 1853, a couple of years into his devotion to such matters and still naively unsure. He suggests a wide range of answers: "The motion of worms & insects?— the flow of sap in trees & the swelling of buds—? Do not the insects awake with the flow of the sap? Blue birds &c prob [sic] do not come till insects come out. Or are there earlier signs in the water—the Tortoises frogs &c" (*Journal* 5, 472-73). Not that there necessarily is a right answer; indeed, the point of an entry such as this may be to draw attention to the wonderful multiplicity of spring. Thoreau's increasingly exhaustive lists of seasonal phenomena, gatherings of facts which are simultaneously rich in their precision and limited by it, function in a similar way. In autumn 1853 he meticulously notes the current state of trees and plants, turning the moment at hand into a rough approximation of the season:

Oct. 24. Early on Nawshawtuct.

Black willows bare. Golden willow with yellow leaves. Larch yellow. Most alders by river bare except at top. Waxwork shows red. Celtis almost bare, with greenish-yellow leaves at top. Some hickories bare, some with rich golden-brown leaves. Locusts half bare, with greenish yellow leaves. Catnip fresh and green and in bloom. Barberries green, reddish, or scarlet. (*Journal* V, 450)

This inventory method of distilling the essence of a season creates its own kind of poetry (on the objective borderlines of natural history) in the process. As Laura Dassow Walls has recently argued in an attempt to still the long-running debate about Thoreau's alleged loss of imagination in his later years, poetry and science in the nineteenth century were not the polar opposites they are today but tools that could be used in the same quest for truth.¹⁵ By the last decade of his life, Thoreau knows more clearly than ever before what he is seeking and how he intends to go about finding it, a certainty which should reassure us that he has not lost his way, even if his lists might frustrate us. His path leads through natural science, and the journal evidence of his painstaking attempts to realize his vision through careful study of the landscape is nothing less than moving, revealing a life given over to a higher purpose.

Thoreau's record of the arrival of spring in 1854 is particularly detailed, ranging from comments on its early signs to lengthy lists of budding and leafing in May (tracing a gradual shift from abstract expectation to solid reality). His starting point back in February is a pure premonition of spring, a sentiment without concrete grounding but rich in indefinite promise: "For several weeks the

fall has seemed far behind, spring comparatively near. Yet I cannot say that there is any positive sign of spring yet; only we feel that we are sloping towards it. The sky has sometimes a warmth in its colors more like summer" (*Journal VI*, 130). In March, the actual signs of spring start amassing: melting snow, greenness in the grass, warm rain, bird song ("Heard the first bluebird,— something like *pe-a-wor*,— and then other slight warblings, as if farther off" [*Journal VI*, 156]). The subtle hopes induced by these random hints pale somewhat when Thoreau begins to gather the evidence of spring in bulk in April and May. He follows the leafing process exactly, noting dates of first appearance, a collection of data which gradually culminates in over four pages of lists of the order of trees coming into leaf (see *Journal VI*, 297-302 [May 24]). Inventories of this kind were certainly not unique to Thoreau, reaching back to the eighteenth-century tradition of nature writing and even to some extent to classical literature.¹⁶ Thoreau was well aware of this; he was familiar with the nature works of English writers such as Gilbert White and William Howitt, who both make use of seasonal tables (see for example the lists of birds in Letters 1 and 2 to Barrington in White's *The Natural History of Selborne*).¹⁷ White's *A Naturalist's Calendar*, which was extracted by Daines Barrington from White's yearbooks and *The Natural History of Selborne* and published in 1795, amounts to a pure list of dates of budding and leafing as well as of plants disappearing, following the structure of the year from January to December.¹⁸ These dates are based on an average of the available information, directly foreshadowing Thoreau's calculation of averages for his 1860s *Kalendar* charts. The volume also contains lists such as "Trees, Order of Losing Their Leaf" and a "Summary of the Weather" month by month between 1768 and 1792; material of no small affinity with Thoreau's late calendrical interests (the list of trees, for example, finds its elaborated counterpart in "Autumnal Tints").

White's *Garden Kalendar* follows a more traditional diary structure, recording in a straightforward way his actions in the garden and other seasonal events between 1751 and 1771. Although a few of these entries could be mistaken for extracts from Thoreau's journal, any kind of forward looking or concern with anticipation is absent here; what White is writing is a pure and precise record of the seasons as they affect his garden, without much aid of (or indeed any need for) transforming imagination. His diary exudes neutral contentment, speaking of a life lived practically in the present, as one side of Thoreau would have loved to be able to live. Consider this entry from September 9, 1765: "Beautiful autumnal weather: most of the corn housed. Gathered my only nect: it was not ripe; but the earwigs had gnawed it so that it could not come to any thing. Gathered my first peach: its flesh was thick, tender, white, & juicy; & parted from the stone. It was a good fruit; but not so high flavoured as some I have met with."¹⁹ In *The Book of the Seasons*, William Howitt includes tables of natural phenomena in his entries on each month as part of an attempt to sum up their characteristics.²⁰ Thoreau reviewed the book in 1836 and would thus have encountered a statistical approach

to nature here, if nowhere else, at a very early stage. More emphatically by far than White or Thoreau, Howitt is concerned with averages, ordering the months into the perfectly regular seasons of a prototype year, with three predictable months in each.²¹ As he explains his intentions at the opening of the January chapter: "I speak now as I intend to speak, *generally*. I describe the season not as it may be in this or another year, but as it is in the average."²² Only when Thoreau finally starts assembling his Kalendar does he come anywhere near to sharing this ambition (and then he employs it in a far more rigorous way than Howitt, a commercial writer, ever did). In the early and mid-1850s, Thoreau's intentions are altogether more modest; he is contented with noting the details without drawing out statistical conclusions.

Howitt's English average seasons are not necessarily applicable to the climate of New England. Thoreau acknowledges this difference when he takes argument, in a journal entry from February 1854, with Howitt's way of ordering the year: "Howitt describes the harvest moon in August. Did I not put it in September?" (*Journal VI*, 112).²³ The difference is largely one of delay; the greater severity of the New England winter (despite its more southerly latitude) makes the wait for spring both longer and more conducive to longing, just as the greater difference between the seasons makes each more precious and distinct.²⁴ The very Concord climate is thus a climate of anticipation, as Thoreau is well aware. In January 1852 he describes the beauty of the sharply defined New England year: "In few countries do they enjoy so fine a contrast of summer & winter—we really have four seasons. each [sic] incredible to the other. Winter cannot be mistaken for summer here. Though I see the boat turned up on the shore & half buried under snow—as I walk over the invisible river—summer is far away" (*Journal 4*, 291). In Concord, the prolonged barrenness of winter makes anticipation both possible and vital, an important fact to bear in mind to make sense of the emotional force Thoreau invests in expecting and enjoying the seasons. Every new season, even winter and fall, amounts to a "wonderful resurrection," altering the whole tone of the world by bringing back conditions different enough to have been forgotten since last time.

Thoreau's main way of keeping absent seasons alive and near is by carefully recording them in the journal, as he does with ever-increasing dedication. As he reads back over the entries made at other times of the year, the seasons they describe often seem more potent than they originally did; revisited from a distance, all times of the year shine with the lustre of otherness. As Thoreau eloquently puts it in October 1853:

It is surprising how any reminiscence of a different season of the year affects us. When I meet with any such in my Journal, it affects me as poetry, and I appreciate that other season and that other phenomenon more than at the time. The world thus seen is all one spring, and full of beauty. You need only to make a faithful

record of an average summer day's experience and summer mood, and read it in the winter, and it will carry you back to more than that summer day alone could show. Only the rarest flower, the purest melody, of the season thus comes down to us. (*Journal V*, 454)

Looking for the excitement of other seasons among his own past journal entries is perhaps no different from seeking the signs of absent seasons in nature; the thrill at an apt encounter is of a similar kind. Thoreau's imagination thrives on difference wherever it finds it, gilding the absent whether he encounters it in writing or in the landscape as such. The extreme reflexivity of this act of seasonal memory is striking, pointing subtly but firmly towards the creation of a self-sufficient universe. Just gather enough material and you can live and relive the year through it, dissolving the need for nature itself, as Thoreau eventually starts to do when assembling charts from journal material. Long before that, he emphasized the importance of making a record that preserves the year in this way: "In a journal it is important in a few words to describe the weather, or character of the day, as it affects our feelings. That which was so important at the time cannot be unimportant to remember" (*Journal VII*, 171). Thoreau must have sensed that these records would become invaluable for his *Kalendar* project; that the journal's final function would be as a storehouse of primary material for his further work. In the 1860s, when he is summing up the seasons, Thoreau is actively reliving them in the process of writing. This reliving can also be done more directly (although this too is ultimately recorded in writing), as when he thinks back to his life of a few months earlier, perhaps, as in the following passage, remembering what it then was like to anticipate nature. On June 21, 1854, he recalls how he sought the seeds of the present full-blown summer in the spring that once was: "When I see the dense, shady masses of weeds about water— already an unexplorable maze, —I am struck with the contrast between this and the spring, [when] I wandered about in search of the first faint greenness along the borders of the brooks. Then an inch or two of green was something remarkable and obvious afar. . . . It is hard to realize that the seeds of all this growth were buried in that bare, frozen earth" (*Journal VI*, 372-73). The intertwinement of memory and anticipation is complex and intense here. Contemplating change, Thoreau looks back to a moment of looking ahead in a heady game with time, crossing it not only once but twice.²⁵

Thoreau also engages with change by noting the disappearance of seasons in the same way he once recorded their arrival. As H. Daniel Peck has put it: "Everything I am writing about beginnings in the *Journal* can also be applied to endings. Although Thoreau noted them less frequently, he was as interested in a season's final manifestations as he was in those marking its initiation, and recorded them as carefully."²⁶ By the middle of July he begins to list flowers which have gone out of blossom (see for example July 25, 1852) and, inversely, to note the lingering signs of summer: "Barn swallows still. . . . *July 31* [1853]. Blue-

curls. Wood thrush still sings" (*Journal VI*, 414). The repetition of "still" in these entries gives a sense of impending lateness; Thoreau is holding on to the season for once, gathering the remnants of summer instead of looking ahead to autumn. When studying seasonal change in early autumn, he thinks in similar terms of absence. A brief observation such as "the locust sounds rare now" (*Journal VII*, 45) soberly marks the need to adjust to September loss, and the losses of autumn are manifold: "Took my last bath the 24th. Probably shall not bathe again this year. It was chilling cold" (*Journal VII*, 58). Perhaps fall invites description of the present through absences and endings of this kind; just add them up and possibly find the sum of the season. Thoreau is particularly susceptible to autumn change in 1854, commenting as early as the second of September on how "It will not be warm again probably" (*Journal VII*, 6). A year which started out with the enumeration of promise, the literal counting of blessings, thus soon enough invites him to trace departures in this way. A haunting list of losses, in some ways more striking than his famous lost turtle-dove, bay horse and hound in *Walden*, could be distilled from Thoreau's autumn entries this year (although it would soon enough be superseded by further lists of winter and spring phenomena, together testifying to only a temporary eclipse of the year).

Seasons, like weather, are easily forgotten, obscured by the new without leaving much of an imprint unless one deliberately takes note of them, perhaps by recording their arrival and departure, as Thoreau realized. The year is continually forgotten and ever-new, although its novel impressions are still resonant with the past, unlocking our deep familiarity with annual cycles: "Each new year is a surprise to us. We find that we had virtually forgotten the note of each bird, and when we hear it again it is remembered like a dream, reminding us of a previous state of existence" (*Journal X*, 304). Without these resonant reminders, true forgetting threatens; this is the burden of Thoreau's rather over-emphatic words, temporarily ignoring both his good memory and his journal record: "It is impossible to remember a week ago— A river of lethe flows with many windings the year through—separating one season from another" (*Journal 5*, 47). Thoreau keeps drawing dividing lines through the year in this manner, sectioning it off into parts of little apparent connection, which are nevertheless easily overridden by anticipation or memory. This insistence on a gulf between the present and the past could be read as evidence of Thoreau's stubborn forward looking, part of an optimistic onward thrust that keenly embraces the future. At the turning of the year 1853-1854, he describes the partially successful process of shaking summer and autumn from the mind: "The thoughts and associations of summer and autumn are now as completely departed from our minds as the leaves are blown from the trees. Some withered deciduous [sic] ones are left to rustle, and our cold immortal evergreens. Some lichenous ones still adhere to us" (*Journal VI*, 37 [December 29, 1853]). Once the symbolic line of the new year has been crossed, Thoreau effectively "closes" the past, ridding himself of its last few lingering

leaves: "It is now fairly winter. We have passed the line, have put the autumn behind us, have forgotten what these withered herbs that rise above the snow here and there are, what flowers they ever bore" (*Journal VI*, 48 [January 3, 1854]). Thoreau seems to have successfully launched himself into the new season and forgotten the past, busy advancing confidently in the direction of his dreams. However, his understanding of the seasons is altogether too complex to be tied down by such facile divisions for long; soon enough, he will remember and dream of the flowers those withered herbs once bore.

Thoreau's journal record of seasonal progress in the early 1850s abounds in evidence of the arbitrariness of the boundaries between different times of the year. His occasional urge to divide the year into distinctive parts thus seems rather rash and sudden, part of a desire to construct a narrative of smooth cyclical progression embracing both spring and fall which nature itself emphatically defies. Looking around at the apparently unified landscape, seasonal development is everywhere at different stages, an infinity of variations held loosely together under the name of each season. It might for example be another season entirely down by the river: "The pontederia leaves are sere and brown along the river— The fall is further advanced in the water as the spring was earlier there. I should say that the vegetation of the river was a month further advanced in its decay than of the land generally" (*Journal 5*, 346). Signs of earlier seasons might linger in the landscape, in extreme cases for a whole year like the winter-made cracks in the ground Thoreau keeps noticing throughout 1854. He frequently comments on these reminders of otherness, if only in passing, as here in September: "I see no swallows now at Clamshell. They have probably migrated. Still see the cracks in the ground, and no doubt shall till snow comes" (*Journal VII*, 18). Marks of continuity, these cracks break through the dividing lines Thoreau seeks to introduce into his conception of the year. He also takes note of other reminders of absent seasons around this time, in particular Indian springs and summers which by their very nature testify to the way seasons refuse to stay put. Periods of warmth beyond expectation, they tend to stir up hopes out of season and set Thoreau off on the familiar track of anticipation. He describes the Indian spring in mid-March 1853 with a degree of disillusionment, as a "first false promise which merely excites our expectations to disappoint them, followed by a short return of winter" (*Journal V*, 22). His comments on the Indian summer the previous December were rather more hopeful, reaching both back and forward to fullness: "The year looks back toward summer—& a summer smile is reflected in her face. . . . At this season I observe the form of the buds which are prepared for spring—the large bright yellowish & reddish buds of the Swamp pink" (*Journal 5*, 400). The mere act of envisioning what has been and will come again is here readily capable of renovating the year, or at least the inner season, with some help from unexpected external warmth.

At once vitally related to nature and separate from it, Thoreau can either exercise his liberty, perhaps by anticipating nature, or give himself over to the

season at hand by soaking in the here and now as deeply as possible. During the winter of 1852, he keeps contemplating his relation to nature, wondering for example about the way life continues to flow in man while the rest of nature withers in annual decay, sure sign of man being somehow unrelated and out of step (see *Journal* 4, 252-53). A short while earlier that January, he dwelt on the need to be better attuned to nature's pace: "Let me not live as if time was short. Catch the pace of the seasons—have leisure to attend to every phenomenon of nature—and to entertain every thought that comes to you. Let your life be a leisurely progression through the realms of nature" (*Journal* 4, 244). Only by catching "the pace of the seasons" in some true sense can we come anywhere near to living in the present, Thoreau realizes, trying hard to attune his restless mind to nature's unfolding events and thus gain a degree of steadiness and inner peace. Living *in* season is, after all, nature's own prerogative: "Everything is done in season and there is no time to spare— The bird gets its brood hatched in season & is off. I looked into the nest where I saw a vireo feeding its young a few days ago—but it is empty—it is fledged & flown" (*Journal* 5, 313). Such attunement to the time at hand is also necessary for Thoreau's creative purposes, his 1850s writing depending directly on his observation of the seasons. As nature is so rich and of such infinite variety, if he could only move in a bit closer and find the words to match it, his writing would surely show a corresponding richness: "Every new flower that opens, no doubt, expresses a new mood of the human mind. Have I any dark or ripe orange-yellow thoughts to correspond? The *flavor* of my thoughts begins to correspond" (*Journal* V, 184).²⁷ Thoreau's imagination thrives on the idea of responding to the present in some intimate way, and beyond that, of being contented with this creative interaction with the landscape. As winter approaches, surely the most hopeful thing we can do is to learn to appreciate it. "'Let us sing winter.' What else can we sing and our voices be in harmony with the season?" (*Journal* VI, 86), Thoreau writes, quoting "a crazy man" of his acquaintance who suddenly ascended the pulpit, prayer book in hand, and thus addressed the church. Perhaps the ultimate goal of Thoreau's restless mind is quite simply to find the place in every season where it can rest a little, a place so beautiful that it is actually worth lingering in, even if a good deal of that beauty is his mind's projection on outer starkness, as it sometimes is. As Thoreau put it with *Walden* confidence, "every season seems best to us in its turn" (313), a sentiment which is increasingly reiterated in the journal, as here in December 1856: "I love the winter, with its imprisonment and its cold, for it compels the prisoner to try new fields and resources. . . . I love best to have each thing in its season only, and enjoy doing without it at all other times" (*Journal* IX, 160).

Perhaps as a way of acknowledging the importance of living in the present, Thoreau occasionally resists the impulse to anticipate nature. On December 31, 1851, the sudden touch of spring in the air instead turns his thoughts back to winter: "It reminds me this thick spring like weather, that I have not enough

valued and attended to the pure clarity & brilliancy of the winter skies—. . . Shall I ever in summer evenings see so celestial a reach of blue sky contrasting with amber as I have seen a few days since" (*Journal* 4, 229-30). Resistance to seasonal anticipation also occurs in more submerged ways, as when Thoreau deliberately does not comment on the coming season even though his observations clearly point in its direction. In June 1854, for example, the connotation of autumn inherent in ripening berries is not actually spelt out: "I see one or two early blueberries prematurely turning. The *Amelanchier Botryapium* berries are already reddened two thirds over" (*Journal* VI, 351). Maybe this is his way of recognizing that these turning berries belong to summer too, or indeed above all, and that their plain existence in the present will do. The most striking aspect of a season *can* be its fullness; the revelation of an essence not to be improved upon.²⁸ In June 1853, the remarkable thing about the still new summer is the fact that it is in its prime, a fact which would seem more and more significant to Thoreau as the 1850s advanced: "As I look over the fields thus reddened in extensive patches, now deeper, now passing into green, and think of the season now in its prime and heyday, it looks as if it were the blood mantling in the cheek of the youthful year,—the rosy cheek of its health, its rude June health" (*Journal* V, 219). Struck by the appearance of the reddened fields, Thoreau is for once looking neither back nor forward, but straight *at* them.²⁹ At least a few times in every season he is similarly entranced by their peak or perfection. In September 1852, he comments lyrically on the intensity of autumn as revealed by the appearance of "great bidens in the sun in brooks," which he describes as "The golden glow of autumn concentrated—more golden than the sun" (*Journal* 5, 342-43). Thoreau is picking out a detail which speaks amply and clearly of the beauty of the whole, and which, just like the turning berries or the reddened fields, is sufficient in itself.

Seeing and describing such season-bound beauty, perhaps Thoreau comes as close to living in the present as he ever will during this period, letting its essence flow effortlessly into his blood. At the end of 1854, after a year marked by unusually restless anticipation, Thoreau arrives for a while at such a stance of appreciation. Towards the end of December he suddenly finds himself in what he calls "the finest days of the year" (*Journal* VII, 89 [December 21]); a few perfect winter days he gladly allows himself to be entranced by. On December 31 he seems to be wholly at peace, concluding a year racked by foretelling and longing in a mood of reverential acceptance, contented with the prospect before him:

Dec. 31. P.M. — On river to Fair Haven Pond.

A beautiful, clear, not very cold day. The shadows on the snow are indigo-blue. The pines look very dark. . . . I see mice and rabbit and fox tracks on the meadow. Once a partridge rises from the alders and skims across the river at its widest part just before me; a fine sight. . . . How glorious the perfect stillness and peace of the winter landscape! (*Journal* VII, 98)

Thoreau's optimism does not reside only in his defiant forward looking; there is even deeper promise to be found in single instances of being such as this winter walk on the last afternoon of the year. It is perhaps in these moments of stillness that Thoreau can begin to *realize* the words of *Walden*, "This is, and no mistake" (98). For sometimes, at least for a moment, before the seeking mind starts seeking again, it must indeed be possible to feel with conviction that this *is* summer (or autumn, or winter, or spring), and no mistake; this is where I belong, and the season and I are one.³⁰

Notes

- 1 Henry Thoreau, *Journal 5*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997), 49. All subsequent references to this edition, indicated by Arabic numerals, will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 2 Sherman Paul, *The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1958), 288.
- 3 Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), 96-97. All subsequent references to this edition will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 4 It might however be argued that the most potent and ideal present to Thoreau is precisely that which is capable of sparking off such imaginative transformations.
- 5 Henry D. Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, fourteen volumes bound as two, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, 1906 (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), *Journal VI*, 392. All subsequent references to this edition, indicated by Roman numerals, will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 6 Henry Thoreau, *Journal 3*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer et al (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), 124. All subsequent references to this edition, indicated by Arabic numerals, will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 7 On this occasion, Thoreau's experience is however tinged by a feeling of being "wrong" in some way, out of step with himself and the world. This mood of slight despondency is relatively rare in the journal.
- 8 Anticipation of seasons is a deeply Proustian practice as experienced by Thoreau. Each and every encounter might transport him to other times of the year and the present is only as rich as the associations it holds, a springboard to dreams. Walking open and affectable through the landscape, Thoreau is walking in the past and future too, seasons mingling in his mind on the slightest suggestion. Gathering what is distant into the present moment in this way, he truly lives in a hybrid present that is suffused with hope.
- 9 As H. Daniel Peck has succinctly put it, "The necessary context for observing the 'first' appearance of a seasonal phenomenon is the natural cycle; any 'first' in nature is recognizable only because it has happened before"; "Reporting the appearance of . . . 'first birds' to his Journal is an act of confirmation as much as an act of origination; the beginning, in Thoreau, always pivots between memory and anticipation." See *Thoreau's*

Morning Work: Memory and Perception in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, the Journal, and Walden (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 98.

- 10 The word "reminds," however, here suggests remembrance of the past only as a submerged secondary meaning. In this context, it even seems to point more emphatically to the future than to the past.
- 11 Thoreau's journal entries tend to swell in bulk each spring. In both 1853 and 1854 for example, his May entries put together are almost twice as long as his January ones (in the 1906 edition, twenty-three pages compared to thirteen in 1853, and twenty-two pages compared to twelve in 1854).
- 12 Thoreau is even capable of grading the seasons according to preference ("How precious a fine day early in the spring—less so in the fall, less still in the summer & winter" [*Journal* 5, 393]), although the validity of such a statement is amply contradicted by the loving attention he bestows on all seasons alike.
- 13 See also the suggestion of a two-part year in Thoreau's description of the "foreglow" and the "afterglow" of the year in the entry for March 18, 1853, both of which are curiously marked by anticipation: "The sun is now declining, with a warm and bright light on all things, a light which answers to the late afterglow of the year, when, in fall, wrapping his cloak closer about him, the traveller goes home at night to prepare for winter. This is the foreglow of the year, when the walker goes home at eve to dream of summer. To-day first I smelled the earth" (*Journal* V, 27). H. Daniel Peck alludes to this theory in his discussion of what he regards as Thoreau's challenge to traditional calendar divisions: "To decide that, 'in fact,' autumn begins in July and that summer begins in May is to appropriate the role of calendar-maker to oneself by appealing to immediate observation, and thus to challenge the traditional calendar's lines of demarcation. This challenge, of course, is part of a larger claim for the efficacy of individual perception" (*Thoreau's Morning Work*, 92-93).
- 14 During November and December 1854, Thoreau was working intensively in particular on his lectures "Life without Principle" and "Moose Hunting." Thoreau gave the latter of these in Philadelphia on November 20 and in Concord on December 5 (it was later incorporated into *The Maine Woods*).
- 15 Laura Dassow Walls suggests that Thoreau continued to engage with both poetry and science in a complex and creative way in his quest to make sense of nature: "In nineteenth-century terms, Thoreau rejected neither poetry nor science, nor did he simply 'reconcile' them, collapsing them together. In the 'consilience' of Emersonian transcendental wholes with Humboldtian empirical science, he sacrificed neither but attempted to create a way of knowing which combined them both into something new." See *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 11.
- 16 John Evelyn's *Kalendarium Hortense* (1664) was one of the first directly calendrical work to appear, followed by works by naturalists such as Gilbert White. Thoreau was also reading the classical agriculturalists Cato, Varro and Columella intensively at the beginning of 1854, copying extensive extracts into the journal (see his entries for January and February 1854 in *Journal* VI, approximately pp. 50-120). These writers were at least to some extent concerned with the seasons, mainly in terms of the farming year.

- 17 Thoreau refers to or quotes from White and Howitt several times in the journal. The first of these entries, a quotation from White on the raven, occurs in March 1853 (*Journal V*, 65). He had however already reviewed William Howitt's *The Book of the Seasons* in March 1836 (see *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, 26-36).
- 18 White's *The Natural History of Selborne* was originally undertaken as an attempt to write a "natural history of the year," an idea he gradually abandoned.
- 19 Gilbert White, *Garden Kalendar 1751-1771*, facsimile of the manuscript in the British Library, introduction and notes by John Clegg (London: Scolar Press, 1975).
- 20 The following self-explanatory tables are inserted in the monthly entries, listing current phenomena: "Calendar of the Flower-Garden," "Select Calendar of British Insects," "Migrations of Birds (Departures and Arrivals)" and "Select Calendar of British Botany."
- 21 In the entry on March for example, Howitt playfully exaggerates the contrast between the months: "Artificial as the division of the months may be deemed by some, it is so much founded in nature, that no sooner comes in a new one than we generally have a new species of weather, and that instantaneously. . . . In comes January,—and let the weather be what it might before, immediately sets in severe cold and frost: in February, wet—wet—wet, which, the moment March enters, ceases—and lo! instead— even on the very first of the month, there is a dry, chill air, with breaks of sunshine stealing here and there over the landscape." See *The Book of the Seasons, or The Calendar of Nature* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 61-62.
- 22 *The Book of the Seasons*, 3.
- 23 Thoreau goes on to work out for himself which months should properly belong to winter: "Is not January alone pure winter? December belongs to the fall; it is a wintry November: February, to the spring; it is a snowy March" (*Journal VI*, 112). Ending up with only one winter month, he leaves Howitt's regular seasons a long way behind. The arbitrariness of our seasonal divisions also becomes clear by a comparison to other ways of demarcating the year. Thoreau was very interested in the way the American Indians considered each month as a season in itself and named them after their characteristics, as numerous entries on this subject in his Indian Notebooks indicate. In chapter seven of *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell draws attention to Thoreau's questioning of the normal "fourfold typology of seasons" (in comparison to predecessors such as James Thomson): "What distinguishes Thomson's representation of the seasons from those of his romantic successors [such as Thoreau] is his sense of the fixity of the seasonal round. . . . 'Inveterate thinker' though he was, Thomson never questioned, as later naturists came to do, whether properly speaking a fourfold typology of seasons made best sense. . . . 'There is a bit of every season in each season,' [Annie] Dillard writes." See *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1995) 227-28. Buell concludes this discussion by emphasizing how important it is that art concerned with the seasons should stretch our understanding of them: "a further measure of the higher skill we call genius is the ability to do at least as much strategic violence to the expected boundaries as any particular iteration of the seasons is bound to do" (232).
- 24 As Lawrence Buell has pointed out, America embraces so many different climates that its seasons are hard to pin down ("A vast continental expanse subject to much more

- dramatic vicissitudes of weather, America was distressingly hard to generalize under any one set of seasonal rubrics." [*The Environmental Imagination*, 230]).
- 25 For another instance of looking back to an earlier forward looking self, see Thoreau's entry for July 18, 1854 ("Where I looked for early spring flowers I do not look for midsummer ones. Such places are now parched and withering" [*Journal VI*, 402]).
- 26 *Thoreau's Morning Work*, 99.
- 27 See also the entry for September 8, 1854, in which Thoreau describes such a moment of correspondence: "Many green-briar leaves are very agreeably thickly spotted now with reddish brown, or fine green on a yellow or green ground, producing a wildly variegated leaf. I have seen nothing more rich. . . . Now, while I am gathering grapes, I see them. It excites me to a sort of autumnal madness. They are leaves for Satyrus and Faunus to make their garlands of. My thoughts break out like them, spotted all over, yellow and green and brown" (*Journal VII*, 27).
- 28 Significantly, Thoreau becomes more and more interested in the prime of seasons towards the end of his life. The late journal abounds in brief notations about plants reaching their peak, shifting its emphasis from anticipation of the future to an endeavour to pin down the present which directly reflects Thoreau's increasing contentment and inner peace. See also Richard Lebeaux's account of Thoreau at the end of the 1850s in *Thoreau's Seasons*, which stresses his gradual arrival at maturity (or "ripening") in these later years. Lebeaux sees a direct relation between Thoreau's interest in the maturity of seasons and his own (Eriksonian) life stage: "Just before he learned of Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry [in 1859], Thoreau had been focusing, as he had the previous two years in particular, on nature's ripening and its correspondence to his own." See *Thoreau's Seasons* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 327.
- 29 However, his imagination is at work as ever, comparing the reddened fields to the rosy cheeks of the year. Perhaps the present needs this creative refigurement, an image able to contain and explain it, to make sense to us.
- 30 I would like to thank Ronald Hoag and Wesley Mott for their helpful suggestions and patient proofreading of this essay.



The Lackawanna Valley (circa 1855)
by George Inness

Henry Thoreau and the Advent of American Rail

Henrik Gustafsson

During the last thirty years of antebellum America, coinciding with the final three decades of Henry Thoreau's life, railroad mileage in the United States exploded. Twenty unconnected miles burgeoned into an articulated network of roughly thirty thousand miles.¹ While the early railroads in the 1820s served mainly as feeders or adjuncts to waterways, the following decades saw the railroad come into its own as transport medium.² With steadily improving speed and efficiency, trains carried freight and passengers to ever more destinations. Business investments, federal incentives and popular fancy combined to make the locomotive an emblem of enterprise and progress. Railroads linked America with its West. When the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads joined at Promontory, Utah, in 1869, it was hailed as a defining event of American civilization.

A network of lines constructed between towns and cities along the Atlantic seaboard preceded the westward expansion. Even tiny Concord, Massachusetts, was linked to Boston in 1844 by the Fitchburg railroad.³ The consequences for Henry Thoreau eventually prompted one of the most famous reactions to the technology in print. *Walden* gave voice to an essentially antagonistic assessment of the railroad. Its utility was questioned. The supposedly grand notions that urged it on were deprecated. And as the railroad physically disturbed the writer's peace of mind, he treated it as an unwelcome intruder. Yet like every other person, Thoreau was powerless against its advance. It made trade and travel easier, and many of Thoreau's fellow villagers found it beneficial to their economy. Quite a few farmers of his generation left their stony fields for new jobs in Boston, or for the loam out West.⁴ Eventually even Thoreau found himself in need of the railroad, though he downplayed this fact in his writings.

When *Walden* was published in 1854, the railroad had already been a presence in Concord for a decade. And while that book's accounts of the railroad have been extensively discussed, questions remain as to how Thoreau reacted to

the railroad at the outset.⁵ Did he form any opinions of it before it reached Concord? How did he later conceive of it as it gradually became an integral part of village life? How did he view its effects on landscape, of which he was such a faithful recorder? Do his comments on the railroad in his writings correspond to his practical attitude towards it? This study will address these questions from a largely chronological perspective, considering Thoreau's correspondence and journals as well as his published works.⁶ Its essential argument is that Thoreau's attitude towards the railroad was ambivalent even in the years before *Walden*. More specifically, it will propose that Thoreau's idealistic disdain for the railroad's materialism and intrusiveness was soon complicated by a pragmatic indulgence of its efficiency, and thereafter by a selective admiration of its more "natural" characteristics and effects.

Enrolled at Harvard, Thoreau had to walk the fifteen miles between Cambridge and Concord at school breaks. Once, on his way home in his freshman year, he "blistered his feet so badly that he hiked the last two miles in his stockings and was three hours going the last few miles from Lincoln to Concord" (*Days*, 44). Local railroads were still in their infancy, and other transportation was either too expensive or infrequent. Dating from his Harvard days, Thoreau's first extant allusion to the railroad is metaphorical. In a school essay of August 30, 1837, he responds to a question on the prevalent "commercial spirit's" effects on the moral character of the nation. He attributes to the "commercial man" a yearning for freedom and speed: when wind and waves no longer suffice, "he must needs ransack the bowels of the earth that he may make for himself a highway of iron over its surface."⁷ So far as the spirit involves freedom and the mitigation of man's slavery to matter all is well, but there is a darker side to the enterprising spirit. Its ruling principle is "a blind and unmanly love of wealth."⁸ While Thoreau ends his essay on a positive note, it nonetheless betrays an early ambivalence.

By the late spring of 1843 the Boston-Fitchburg railroad was well under way. The Irish work teams were steadily nearing Concord. Meanwhile Thoreau stayed at William Emerson's household on Staten Island, working as tutor for Emerson's son and seeking to break into the literary market of New York. He keenly waited for news of the road's progress and kept a lively correspondence with his family and R. W. Emerson. In a letter to his sister Sophia on May 22, he expressed a hope that the family would "not be washed away by the Irish sea" (*Correspondence*, 106). R. W. Emerson wrote to Thoreau on June 10, confirming that "[t]he town is full of Irish & the woods of engineers with theodolite & red flag singing out their feet & inches to each other from station to station. Near Mr Alcott's the road is already begun" (*Correspondence*, 117). Detached from the scenes of construction, Thoreau remained curious throughout the summer, at the same time glad to be away from the worksites. Addressing his mother on August 6, and probably referring to his parents' habitual walks in the vicinity of their

home, he wrote: "I should have liked to be in Walden woods with you, but not with the railroad" (*Correspondence*, 131).

On September 8 R. W. Emerson wrote Thoreau a letter that summed up his own concerns regarding the new road:

The work goes on very fast. The mole which crosses the land . . . to the depot, is eighteen feet high, and goes on two rods every day. A few days ago a new contract was completed,—from the terminus of the old contract to Fitchburg,—the whole to be built before October, 1844; so that you see our fate is sealed. I have not yet advertised my house for sale . . . but I can easily foresee that some inconveniences may arise from the road, when open, that shall drive me from my rest. (*Correspondence*, 137)

Soon Thoreau returned home to appraise the situation for himself. His efforts to reach city magazines during his Staten Island sojourn did not prove fruitful. Instead, his sights refocused on *The Dial*, where Emerson served as editor. A year previously Thoreau had published "A Natural History of Massachusetts," and now by September he secured publication of "A Winter Walk." Each of these works makes reference to railroads. As in the school essay of 1837, the comments come as asides.

In "A Natural History of Massachusetts"—formally a review of state reports on local fauna—Thoreau contrasts a "din of religion, literature, and philosophy" with a calmer "pulse of nature." Where the man-made clamor recedes, our sleep improves. Upon our awakening, however, nature's subtle pulse "disappears with smoke and rattle like the cars on a railroad."⁹ We are thus jolted awake to the din once more, and can only briefly feel nature's beat as it abates. The railroad serves as a somewhat ostentatious—and perhaps misplaced—rhetorical device. While intended as a boisterous illustration of the process of awakening, it actually muddles the statement. Comparing the "pulse of nature" to the noise of railcars hardly strengthens nature's distinction from human "din."

In "A Winter Walk" Thoreau uses railroad imagery to describe an interlude of river skating. Along the ice he joyously exclaims: "The deep, impenetrable marsh . . . is made pervious to our swift shoes, as if a thousand railroads had been made into it."¹⁰ The reference is positive, even mildly ecstatic. Thoreau attempts to illustrate the smooth ease of motion by associating it with a spread of railroad tracks. Apart from this halting likeness, a significant difference is also suggested. Since it is clearly unreasonable that "a thousand" actual tracks should ever be laid over the river, Thoreau obviously mentions them metaphorically—and clearly so at the expense of the railroad. For here the maker of tracks is the skater in his freedom; only he is empowered to make "a thousand" tracks by virtue of the river ice. A locomotive with its engineer, by contrast, has no such flexibility. That Thoreau here deliberately alludes to a latent "weakness" of rail technology is very probable.

In November 1843, Thoreau submitted a review to *The Democratic Review* concerning J. A. Etzler's *The Paradise within the Reach of all Men, without Labour, by Powers of Nature and Machinery* (2d ed., London, 1842). Etzler's utopian vision involved harnessing various natural forces—wind, tide, and sun—by as yet undeveloped technology. By simultaneously organizing people in communities and communizing economic activities, Etzler reasoned, most forms of labor would eventually be rendered unnecessary.¹¹ Thoreau's response to Etzler's theory reveals both his transcendental convictions (emphasizing the primacy of individual reform) and his skepticism of technology. "Every machine . . . seems a slight outrage against universal laws," he says, and qualifies: "Already nature is serving all those uses which science slowly derives on a much higher and grander scale to him that will be served by her."¹² Thoreau argues that nature will amply fill human needs without being transformed by technology. Further, in the distilling of nature's energy into machinery, man's morals are liable to be discarded: "The chief fault of [Etzler's] book is, that it aims to secure the greatest degree of gross comfort and pleasure merely."¹³ Indirectly, Thoreau indicts the railroad with these charges. The railroad he had hitherto evoked in his papers was a symbol of rapaciousness, arguably closely allied to Etzler's supposed yearning for a comfortable utopia. It also symbolized inflexibility as compared to nature and the natural man—well illustrated by the skating episode in "A Winter Walk."

1844 saw the completion of Concord's link to Boston.¹⁴ Despite Thoreau's nascent leanings against it, the railroad's temptation proved overpowering. Now that it was possible to travel conveniently to Boston and back in a day, Thoreau often took the opportunity to borrow books at Boston libraries. But he rarely mentioned the fact—and much less how he traveled. This is also true of his longer railroad travels—they remain hushed in his writings. It is tempting to ascribe this silence partly to the awkward position the railroad takes already in his earliest works. Further, more than ample evidence shows that Thoreau preferred travel by foot. An early journal note of April 20, 1840, sets the tone for many future statements: "An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day."¹⁵ Walking could be construed as a more worthy individual action than riding among sedentary travelers, "'whose legs hang dangling the while'" as he put it.¹⁶ Even when he used the railroad on longer excursions, the overt goal of nearly every such journey was a hiking tour or lecturing assignment. Curt in acknowledging any use of public transportation, Thoreau's travel accounts in these cases consist mainly of nature notes from his rambles. Oddly enough, when on lecturing trips Thoreau rarely kept record of anything relative to his performances. As Dean and Hoag point out, "His journal entries and letters covering these junkets often say little or nothing about his lectures, but they record, often in great detail, the many field trips and walking tours he managed to integrate into his generally brief visits."¹⁷

In time Thoreau would undertake several long journeys that involved railroad travel. His Canadian sojourn in 1850 (comprising over a thousand

railroad miles) serves as a case in point. He never discusses the railroad in his published account of the trip. "I wished only to be set down in Canada, and take one honest walk there as I might in Concord woods" he says in his first paragraph.¹⁸ And indeed, next to nothing follows on train travel. Thoreau merely maintains a distortion of his vision of landscape: "These . . . trees appeared very numerous, for our rapid progress connected those that were even some miles apart."¹⁹ Yet a private journal entry from the trip provides a noteworthy passage that did not reach the published version. Under October 31, Thoreau writes of his ride: "I am wont to think that I could spend my days contentedly in any retired country house that I see—for I see it to advantage now & without incumbrance—I have not yet imported my humdrum thoughts—my prosaic habits into it to mar the landscape."²⁰ As Bachelard points out, Thoreau is here "sunk deep in day-dreaming," pleasantly lulled by the "rapid progress" of the train.²¹ Thus, while Thoreau frowns upon speed and smooth motion in his official account, his journal—perhaps inadvertently—mitigates that response.

Thoreau's ambivalent attitude towards the experience of railroad travel belies his alleged aversion to public transport. He proved not to be an abstaining Luddite. As several critics show, pragmatic concerns also overruled his "stay-at-home" rhetoric. When interested in an excursion to Maine or Cape Cod, for example, it was more often the expense than the transport means that deterred him. Tellingly enough, a temporary cut-rate offer from the railroad company prompted his 1850 trip to Canada.²²

From July 1845 to September 1847, Thoreau spent most of his days at Walden Pond, writing and polishing drafts of *A Week* and *Walden*. The new Fitchburg railroad skirted the pond's southwest corner, just visible from the writer's cabin site (*Walden*, 130).²³ Trains passed daily at regular though long intervals, clearly audible over the water. Their vapor plumes were often seen thrusting above the shore treeline. A journal note from this period relates Thoreau's fascination with an exotic train cargo: "I am refreshed and expanded when the freight-train rattles past me on the rail road—and I smell the stores which have been dispensing their odors from long-wharf last—which remind me of foreign parts of coral reefs & Indian oceans and tropical climes—& the extent of the globe—I feel more a citizen of the world at the sight of the palm leaf . . . —the manilla cordage—& the cocoanut husks" (*Journal* 2, 237-38). As the train rumbles past, Thoreau also catches sight of "old Junk & scrap iron," sailcloth, Maine lumber, and rolls of lime, while smells of salt fish and "molasses or rum" are also noted (*Journal* 2, 238). His response to the train is interesting for its positive tone. In expanded form this entry will contrast with his familiar iron horse passages in *Walden*, where the train (when directly encountered) is otherwise mostly presented as an unwelcome intruder (*Walden*, 119-22, cf. 116).

From the vantages of Thoreau's walks—Fair Haven Hill and Nawshawtuct Hill among them—the railroad's impact on the landscape around Concord must

have seemed extensive if not imposing. Forming a blunt arrowhead, the tracks merged from the west and southeast, prodding the town's southwest end.²⁴ Yet standing on the summit of a local hill with all in plain view, Thoreau chose to disregard modernity's encroachment on the landscape. As late as 1862, in "Walking," he willfully asserts the purity of his panorama: "Man and his affairs, church and state and school, trade and commerce, and manufactures and agriculture, even politics, the most alarming of them all—I am pleased to see how little space they occupy in the landscape."²⁵ This perception surely involves a romantic diminution of foreign objects. The railroad particularly—with its causeways, tracks, smoke trails, rattling and whistles—ought already in the mid 1840s to have been too much of a presence to be credibly overlooked.

On November 14, 1847, soon after concluding his Walden stay, Thoreau wrote to Emerson, then on a tour of England. Describing events of Concord and the Emerson household (where Thoreau acted as caretaker in Emerson's absence), he also related an incident just witnessed:

As I walked over Conantum, the other afternoon, I saw a fair column of smoke rising from the woods directly over my house that was (as I judged), and already began to conjecture if my deed of sale would not be made invalid by this. But it turned out to be John Richardson's young wood, on the southeast of your field. It was burnt nearly all over, and up to the rails and the road. It was set on fire, no doubt, by the same Lucifer that lighted Brooks's lot before. So you see that your small lot is comparatively safe for this season, the back fire having been already set for you. (*Correspondence*, 192)

As Harding's comments on the letter clarify, "the Lucifer was the railroad train that was constantly setting fire to Concord woods" (*Correspondence*, 193). Thoreau took to strong words to describe the "culprit." But two factors ought perhaps to have dampened his reaction. One was the ultimately positive effect of the fire in question for Emerson, while inconsequential to Thoreau's own business of selling his cabin (both facts also noted, not without satisfaction, in the passage). The second concerns the circumstance of Thoreau's own accidental starting of a fire three years earlier. That fire burned off more than three hundred acres of forest in the same region, and gave Thoreau an infamous reputation as "woodburner" among angered villagers (*Days*, 159-61). The locomotive in the present case was no more guilty than Thoreau, yet Thoreau never came to concede his own negligence as faulty—much less as mean or devilish. Summing up an account of "his" fire in a journal entry six years after the fact, he tellingly shifts emphasis from his own role to a subsequent one of the railroad: "The locomotive engine has since burned over the same ground & more & in some measure blotted out the memory of the previous fire" (*Journal* 3, 75-78).²⁶

During the following two years, 1848-49, Thoreau worked to complete his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. It was published on

May 30, 1849, after years of continuous redrafting. An amalgam of various themes explored in conjunction with the account of an 1839 boating trip with his brother, *A Week* is still seen by many as marred by superfluous essay material. The long gestation period of *A Week* brought more than a swell of themes and pages, however. As Thoreau reworked and expanded his book, he also reflected upon changes occurred since the original excursion. As recent critics point out, John's death in 1842 proved pivotal for *A Week*, making a crucial layer of its narrative revolve around questions of loss and memory.²⁷ This private ordeal dominates the book, and colors the tone of many of its themes. As Johnson shows, Thoreau's sense of loss in *A Week* extends to the environs of the voyage, parts of which he revisited on a walking trip in 1848. The Merrimack valley was by then far more industrialized, the railroad having made the river a commercially redundant waterway (*Weave*, 4, 39-40).

In Thoreau's original draft, the brothers moor for the "Sunday" night at a bank in Tyngsboro, but are "kept awake by the boisterous sport of some Irish laborers on the railroad" (*Weave*, 323).²⁸ Johnson contends:

[This] was an ominous sound, for the railroad spelled the end of the river as he and John had known it. Thoreau was later [in the final version] forced to conclude his description of the Merrimack in "Sunday" by acknowledging that, in the southern reaches of the river, its true channel was the "iron channel" of the railroad and that "instead of the scream of a fish-hawk scaring the fishes, is heard the whistle of the steam-engine arousing a country to its progress" (W 87). By 1848 the railroad had been extended all the way to Concord, New Hampshire, beyond the farthest reach of their 1839 voyage. At the conclusion of an extended celebration of canal boats, which play such an important role in *A Week*, Thoreau consequently added: "Since our voyage the railroad on the bank has been extended, and there is now but little boating on the Merrimack. All kinds of produce and stores were formerly conveyed by water, but now nothing is carried up the stream, and almost wood and bricks alone are carried down, and these are also carried on the railroad. The locks are fast wearing out, and will soon be impassable, since the tolls will not pay the expense of repairing them, and so in a few years there will be an end of boating on this river" (W 213). (*Weave*, 39-40)

There is of course a latent irony in the fact that the locks are just as commercially motivated as the railroad succeeding them. Nevertheless, the railroad's progression and its effects on river boating compound the writer's elegiac mood. In "Tuesday," Thoreau depicts the railroad as an agent of abrupt or even violent change: "Railroads have been made through certain irritable districts, breaking their sod, and so have set the sand to blowing, till it has converted fertile farms into deserts, and the Company has had to pay the damages" (*Week*, 199). This brief note, inserted into a surprisingly jocular passage on the spread of sand near the

Merrimack, gives the reader a harsh impression of what the force of historical change can bring about for individuals and their families.

The railroad references in *A Week* often concern a sense of historical loss that reveals a personal one as well. The engineer surveying land for the Lowell and Nashua railroad in "Friday," for example, comes as a historical portent. A couple living by the Merrimack bankside take pains to show him how high the river can rise. They find their old marking nail in a hollow of their apple tree, but the engineer disregards this marker since "no one else remembered the river to have risen so high" (*Week*, 356). The engineer obviously uses a method of mass interviews. It amounts to a gauging of the "common truth"—and Thoreau's disposition towards such truth is implicitly hostile. A triumphant rebuttal follows his account of the engineer's query: "I learn that there has since been a freshet which rose within nine inches of the rails at Biscuit Brook, and such a freshet as that of 1785 would have covered the railroad two feet deep" (*Week*, 356). Thoreau rather forcedly contends that the engineer—while behaving rationally—should not have neglected the couple's evidence. He heavy-handedly hints the railroad's oppressive force against individuals. As some of his earlier passages clarify, the railroad causes land erosion and forced eviction for some. Here others find it simply disregarding their testimony, with all that is thereby implied.

But there are more grounds for scepticism towards the railroad in *A Week*. The railroad also brings a spiritual erosion. In "Monday," the poem "With frontier strength ye stand your ground" culminates in the westward pilgrim's striving upwards:

Even beyond the West
 Thou migratest,
 Into unclouded tracts,
 Without a pilgrim's axe,
 Cleaving thy road on high
 (*Week*, 165)

Later in "Thursday" Thoreau muses on the loss of physical frontiers: "Go where we will on the *surface* of things, men have been there before us" (*Week*, 303). This loses its importance, however, for the writer subsequently maintains that "the lives of men, though more extended laterally in their range, are still as shallow as ever" (*Week*, 304).²⁹ With these passages, Thoreau contrasts the heavenly aspiration of the transcendentalist with the merely horizontal extension of other men and their machines.

Further, a significant passage discussing travel occurs in "Thursday." When the brothers leave their boat behind to continue by foot towards the summit of Agiocochook, a mystic is quoted as recommending travel to those who can subsist by work of their hands. To this Thoreau adds a necessary taste for "wild

fruits and game,” and then maintains: “A man may travel fast enough and earn his living on the road” (*Week*, 304). Citing himself as an example, he tells how “A man once applied to me to go into a factory, stating conditions and wages, observing that I succeeded in shutting the window of a railroad car in which we were travelling, when the other passengers had failed. ‘Hast thou not heard of a Sufi, who was hammering some nails into the sole of his sandal; an officer of cavalry took him by the sleeve, saying, come along and shoe my horse’” (*Week*, 305). By directly appending this anecdotal quote to the railcar man’s request, Thoreau makes the passage pointedly tongue-in-cheek. The cavalry officer and the railcar man cannot comprehend different motivations for the same action. The Sufi may be hammering away for a reason of his own, just as Thoreau might have his own reasons for being of service in the car. But the irony deepens when Thoreau closes his account by asserting that “the cheapest way to travel, and the way to travel the furthest in the shortest distance, is to go afoot” (*Week*, 305).

The goal of the brothers’ walk in “Thursday”—which frames the discussion of foot travel—is Agiocochook, also known as Mount Washington. Johnson shows how Thoreau deletes mention of a number of manmade facilities along the way:

In the Journal [Thoreau] noted that they had “crossed a rude wooden bridge over the Amonnoosuck and breathed the free air of the Unappropriated Land” (*J* 2:268); in *A Week* they cross the stream “on prostrate trees.” Implicitly, since they are “*enabled* to reach the summit of AGIOCOCHOOK” (*W* 314, emphasis added), their journey is made possible, not by man or manmade improvements, but by the consent of nature and the Indian gods of Agiocochook. (*Weave*, 24)

Johnson offers a related and compelling argument for the writer’s tendency of silencing or de-emphasizing certain aspects of travel: Thoreau’s editing to “naturalize” his work clearly adheres to a conscious literary strategy to stress the wildness of country and ruggedness of trekking.

Close upon the publication of *A Week*, Thoreau jotted down some notes on the English railroad in his journal. They concern an unsigned critique in the *Quarterly Review* of Arthur Smith’s *The Bubble of the Age; or, the Fallacies of Railway Investments, Railway Accounts, and Railway Dividends* (London, 1848), the *Rules and Regulations* of the London and North Western Railway Company (1848), and *Herepath’s Railway and Commercial Journal* (1848) (*Thoreau’s Reading*, 225). Thoreau captioned his long entry simply “London & North-Western,” and it comprises a spread of notes on railroad durability, speed, maintenance, growth, and material composition (*Journal* 3, 12-13). Whether Thoreau contemplated some further use of these notes or not, intriguingly he placed them in the journals, and not in any of the “commonplace” books usually reserved for factual entries.

Thoreau's reading elsewhere reflected his curiosity about the railroad. He owned a *Complete railway map to accompany the American Railway Guide* (New York: undated) and also made much use of Emerson's copies of the *United States. War Department. Reports of explorations and surveys, to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi river to the Pacific ocean, made under the direction of the secretary of war, in 1853- (6)* (12 vols; Washington, 1855-60) (*Thoreau's Reading*, 157, 284). Notes from these volumes spread over several of Thoreau's fact books.

Regarding the nation's westward project, Thoreau did not remain neutral: he saw it as fueled by base motivations. Angered over the 1850s goldrush to California, he emphatically condemned it in a journal entry of February 1, 1852: "Going to California. It is only 3 000 miles nearer to Hell" (*Journal* 4, 317). Even in a more balanced mood his principal objections remained. Writing to his friend H. G. O. Blake on February 27, 1853, he elaborated on his opinion:

The whole enterprise of this nation which is not an upward, but a westward one, toward Oregon California, Japan &c, is totally devoid of interest to me, whether performed on foot or by a Pacific railroad. It is not illustrated by a thought it is not warmed by a sentiment, there is nothing in it which one should lay down his life for, nor even his gloves, hardly which one should take up a newspaper for. It is perfectly heathenish—a flibustiering *toward* heaven by the great western route. No, they may go their way to their manifest destiny which I trust is not mine. May my . . . dollars whenever I get them help to carry me in the other direction. . . . What end do they propose to themselves beyond Japan? What aims more lofty have they than the prairie dogs? (*Correspondence*, 296)

The remarks here echo Thoreau's assertion of the prevailing and coarse "lateral extension" of men in *A Week*. He saw the drive west as horizontal merely; as uninformed of any higher purpose than material gain.

Closer to home, Thoreau had earlier noticed social and demographic effects of the railroad impacting on his community. On September 28, 1851, he wrote in his journal:

The rail-roads as much as anything appear to have unsettled the farmers. Our young Concord farmers & their young wives hearing this bustle about them—seeing the world all going by as it were—some daily to the cities about their business, some to California—plainly cannot make up their minds to live the quiet retired old-fashioned country-farmer's life— They are impatient if they live more than a mile from a railroad. While all their neighbors are rushing to the road—there are few who have character or bravery enough to live off the road. (*Journal* 4, 108-9)

The railroad's presence was doubtless an alluring factor to many Concord farmers. It brought access to a speedier and more efficient transport medium for dispatch of their farm products. Living close to the railroad also minimized local transport costs. But Thoreau's criticism aims higher than at these practical concerns. He laments the loss of an "old-fashioned country-farmer's life," and credits the few resolute on remaining as full of character and bravery. The majority may be acting on hopes of a better economy, Thoreau implies, yet yielding to the temptation that the railroad symbolizes will inevitably lead to moral degeneration. This is made clear by the charged words associated with the railroad: "bustle," "world," "California." Further, those disposed to move nearer the tracks (or to leave altogether) are described as "unsettled" and "impatient"—foolish enough to be dragged into a collective craze as "all their neighbors are rushing."

Yet Thoreau's real alternative to those inclined to approach and make use of the railroad remains unclear. The "old-fashioned" life he proposes may well have seemed economically untenable to a younger generation of farmers.³⁰ As Lebeaux remarks, the westward urge was very strong among young Concordians during Thoreau's lifetime; so powerful even that one may ponder if Thoreau would not have needed to define himself against it (as opposed to merely ignoring it) in order to justify his own staying on.³¹ He was, after all, not bent on a conventional career such as his education would have facilitated, and as a writer he was struggling at best. In this context a moral argument would undoubtedly serve him as a good defense, as it could fence out both the conventional career option *and* the radical solution of leaving. For both, it could be argued, were instigated by such worldly cares as money and material comfort. Tellingly, in the February 27, 1853, letter to H. G. O. Blake, Thoreau elaborates along such lines on his own choice to stay back East in defiance: "I would rather be a captive knight, and let them all pass by, than to be free only to go whither they are bound" (*Correspondence*, 296). What better way to illustrate one's moral virtue than by assuming knighthood, and a captive one to boot?³²

* * * * *

Thoreau obviously felt deeply troubled by the railroad and its implications. In his works he generally either criticized or ignored it. But he ultimately needed the railroad in his personal life. Apart from transport to his lecturing engagements out of town—which will be discussed further on—he also needed access to a well-stocked library. On September 17, 1849, he wrote a letter to Harvard University President Jared Sparks applying for a book-loan permit. He justified his request thus:

I am encouraged to ask this, not merely because I am an alumnus of Harvard, residing within a moderate distance of her halls, but *because I have chosen letters*

for my profession, and so am one of the clergy embraced by the spirit at least of her rule. Moreover, though books are to some extent my stock and tools, I have not the usual means with which to purchase them. I therefore regard myself as one whom especially the library was created to serve. If I should change my pursuit or move further off, I should no longer be entitled to this privilege. (*Correspondence*, 249)

The letter would be of relatively little interest had Emerson not alluded to it during his address at Thoreau's funeral. In Emerson's anecdotal version of the event, Thoreau personally went to the library, whereupon the librarian refused to lend him books. Thoreau then approached the school President, who pointed out that only resident graduates, alumni clergymen, and a few others within a circle of ten miles' radius from the college were allowed to take out books. As a retort, Emerson recalls, "Mr. Thoreau explained to the President that the railroad had destroyed the old scale of distances," and then renounced the library rules as "useless."³³ Thoreau eventually got his permit (*Days*, 266-68).³⁴

This episode, with its invocation of the railroad as an ally, reveals Thoreau's pragmatic ambivalence. The railroad had "compressed" the distance between his home and the library thanks to its very "lateral extension" and speed—two aspects of the technology Thoreau was intrinsically wary of. However, seeing his library books at stake subdued any qualms over self-contradiction.

Indeed, a perceived "higher purpose" would frequently come to excuse Thoreau's railroad excursions. "In his travels," Emerson says, "he used the railroad only to get over so much country as was unimportant to the present purpose."³⁵ Simply put, the railroad stretches were not seen as important in themselves: they were subordinated to a higher purpose of acquiring books, taking new walks, or giving lectures. As symbol of a degenerated westward urge, of commercial strivings, and general haste, the railroad could be construed as a formidable moral foe. As transport for one with a higher aim, however, the railroad eventually became tolerable to a degree that almost—but not quite—warranted open mention and discussion.

* * * * *

Thoreau's gradual acceptance of the railroad can be inferred from his writings in the early 1850s. "It is easy to foresee that one extensive and well conducted & orderly institution like a rail-road will keep time & order for a whole country" he says in his journal on June 8, 1850 (*Journal* 3, 82). Several following entries objectively describe and discuss implications of the Fitchburg railroad, and notably its Deep Cut. On September 2, 1851, Thoreau noted a discovery and a question in his journal: "Found the succory at Minn's Bridge on R R—& beyond. Query— May not this & the Tree Primrose and other plants be distributed from

Boston on the rays of the Railroads—the seeds mixing with the grains & all kinds of dirt & being blown from the passing freight cars?” (*Journal* 4, 32). Thoreau writes as matter-of-factly of the railroad as of the plants that seem to have been spread by its cars. He treats it on a par with a natural phenomenon—as an agent of seed dispersion like a squirrel or bird or high wind.

Five years later, on February 14, 1856, Thoreau would return to a similar matter in his journal. He then reported of a walk towards Walden pond that

I was struck to-day by the size and continuousness of the natural willow hedge on the east side of the railroad causeway, at the foot of the embankment, next to the fence. Some twelve years ago, when that causeway was built through the meadows, there were no willows there or near there, but now . . . quite a dense willow hedge has planted itself. I used to think that the seeds were brought with the sand from the Deep Cut in the woods, but there is no golden willow there; but now I think that the seeds have been blown hither from a distance, and lodged against the foot of the bank, just as the snow-drift accumulates there. . . . For years a willow might not have been persuaded to take root in that meadow; but run a barrier like this through it, and in a few years it is lined with them. . . . The sand-bank is a shore to them, and the meadow a lake. How impatient, how rampant, how precocious these osiers! . . . Thus they take advantage even of the railroad, which elsewhere disturbs and invades their domains. May I ever be in as good spirits as a willow! How tenacious of life! How withy! How soon it gets over its hurts! They never despair. . . . They are emblems of youth, joy, and everlasting life. . . . This hedge is, of course, as straight as the railroad or its bounding fence.³⁶

This entry illuminates Thoreau's complex stance towards the railroad as transformer of landscape. On the one hand it fosters a group of willows alongside its tracks, where the surrounding meadow is not to their liking. Seen from this angle the railroad is a positive influence. It creates a seedbed for willow growth that pleases the writer. On the other hand, the railroad elsewhere intrudes into the tree's domains, robbing it of territory. This troubling duality gains definition when we notice that Thoreau intersperses the passage with his own explicit identifications with and celebrations of the willows.³⁷ He describes them as emblems of tenacious youth, impervious to hurt or despair. This culminates with his own aspiration towards their stoic qualities: “May I ever be . . . as a willow.” Yet the eulogy lasts only a moment. Thoreau ends by reminding the reader of the willows' utter confinement to the railroad causeway and fence, where they are lined up in conformity along the track.

Albeit brief, Thoreau's close identification with the willows suggests wider associations. Are they alone in experiencing the mixed blessing of the railroad? Are the willows the sole victims being curbed and bounded by its

extension, even as that extension facilitates their travel along its lines? Is *their* implicitly wild growth the only such growth impaired or “hedged”? Ironically undercutting the reverie on their heroic qualities is the acknowledgment of their ultimate containment by the fence bordering the railroad. The text’s shifts between reverie and observation are crucial to its interpretation. Thoreau achieves a contrast between the actual and the ideal, most effective in the last shift where his musings are cut short with an emphatic “of course” that squarely relates the willows to the confining railroad.³⁸

The railroad takes on negative connotations when related to Thoreau’s personal morals. While he can still criticize it in that context, it has by the 1850s become an integral part of his landscape, and he largely accepts it as such. A journal entry logged February 3, 1852, describes impressions from an evening walk along the tracks toward the cliffs:

I hear my old acquaintance the owl from the Causeway. The reflector of the cars as I stand over the deep cut—makes a large & dazzling light in this air— The cars do not make much noise—or else I am used to it and now whizzes the boiling sizzling kettle by me—in which the passengers make me think of potatoes—which a fork would show to be done by this time. The steam is denser for the cold & more white—like the purest downy clouds in the summer sky its volumes roll up between me & the moon. And far behind when the cars are a mile off it still goes shading the fields with its wreathes. The breath of the panting traveller. I now cross from the RR to the road. (*Journal* 4, 324)

The train now neither surprises nor agitates Thoreau. He calmly notes its passing, and likens its vapor trail to “downy clouds in the summer sky.” Thoreau thus effects a temporary blending of a technological and natural phenomenon.³⁹ Before stepping down from the causeway, however, he disperses his cloud image by concluding that the steam in fact constitutes “the breath of the panting traveller.” Apart from this brief ironic wryness, a mood of resigned acceptance pervades the passage: “The cars do not make much noise—or else I am used to it.”⁴⁰ Thoreau here acknowledges the railroad’s place in the landscape, but falls short of welcoming its presence.

Only a month later, however, Thoreau seems thoroughly reconciled to that presence. A journal entry of March 9, 1852, shows him once again out walking along the causeway. Captioned “3 Pm down the R R.,” the passage reads:

The RR men have now their hands full— I hear & see blue-birds come with the warm wind. The sand is flowing in the deep cut— I am affected by the sight of the moist red sand or subsoil under the edge of the sandy bank—under the pitch pines. The r-road is perhaps our pleasantest & wildest roads. It only makes deep cuts into & through the hills—on it are no houses nor foot travellers. The travel

on it does not disturb me. The woods are left to hang over it — Though straight is wild in its accompaniments—all is raw edges. Even the laborers on it are not like other laborers— Its houses if any are shanties—& its ruins the ruins of shanties shells where the race that built the R R dwelt—& the bones they gnawed lie about. I am cheered by the sound of running water now down the wooden troughs on each side the cut. Then it is the driest walking in wet weather & the easiest in snowy. This road breaks the surface of the earth. Even the sight—of smoke from the shanty excites me today. Already these puddles on the RR reflecting the pine woods remind me of summer lakes (*Journal 4*, 382-83)

Warm weather has come early, and maintenance crews need to inspect and repair stretches of the track where the sleepers are being dislodged by thaw or sand erosion. Thoreau seems genuinely to enjoy himself in the spring scenery. The flow of sand and water, the sight of bluebirds, the warm wind: all these factors serve to pacify any disgruntlement on account of railroad activity. Indeed Thoreau erupts in sheer joy. Praising the railroad specifically for providing an excellent walking facility in adverse weather, he calls it “our pleasantest & wildest” road. It offers solitude from other foot travelers, and lies relatively secluded from village houses as well. Former reservations are largely subdued. The travel on the railroad “does not disturb me,” Thoreau says. Moreover, he now voices a positive opinion of the trackside vegetation. Though the road is straight, it is “wild in its accompaniments—all is raw edges.” Thus the critic’s eye ultimately switches vantage from the surrounding landscape to one from the track itself. Though an active saunterer’s vision is engaged (rather than one of a “passive” passenger), it is importantly a view *from* the railroad. Seen from this perspective, the surrounding vegetation will naturally seem “wild” and of “raw edge” —regardless of other observations to the contrary.

* * * * *

After Thoreau’s graduation from Harvard in 1837, lecturing became an intermittent activity. Far from reaching the success of Emerson, he nevertheless gave at least seventy-five lectures during his lifetime, forty-three of them before *Walden*’s publication. Many of the lecture invitations came from outside Concord (around fifty of seventy-five), and Thoreau often needed the railroad to meet them.⁴¹ A number of journal entries refer to train travel in conjunction with his lectures, though most give mere notations. Often enough Thoreau mentions neither transport nor lecture. In the journal of 1854 there are some important clues as to these silences. An entry of September 19 shows Thoreau pondering his near future:

Thinking this afternoon of the prospect of my writing lectures and going abroad to read them the next winter, I realized how incomparably great the advantages of

obscurity and poverty which I have enjoyed so long (and may still perhaps enjoy). . . . I have given myself up to nature; I have lived so many springs and summers and autumns and winters as if I had nothing else to do but *live* them. . . . I do not see how I could have enjoyed [this advantage], if the public had been expecting as much of me as there is danger now that they will. If I go abroad lecturing, how shall I ever recover the lost winter?⁴²

Here the root of Thoreau's ambivalence to lecturing (and its contingent railroad travel) becomes clear: he gained money, but lost experience.⁴³ Despite these misgivings, Thoreau would continue lecturing as long as his invitations and health allowed. He delivered several that same winter: among them "What Shall It Profit" on December 6 in the Railroad Hall in Providence, Rhode Island. The hall was part of the new depot there, and Thoreau reported that he was "struck with the Providence depot, its towers and great length of brick" (*Journal* 7, 79). In the same entry he described his train ride with some regret: "I see thick ice and boys skating all the way to Providence, but know not when it froze, I have been so busy writing my lecture."

Of the experience of railroad travel during lecturing excursions, Thoreau often seems unimpressed. On a journey to Philadelphia two weeks before Providence, he noted "[b]eyond Hartford a range of rocky hills crossing . . . on each side the railroad" and claimed the "[p]leasantest part of the whole route [to be] between Springfield and Hartford, along the river" (*Journal* 7, 72-73). This was daytime, however. Later in the evening, while slowly nearing his destination, Thoreau complained: "Saw only the glossy panelling of the cars reflected out into the dark, like the magnificent lit façade of a row of edifices reaching all the way to Philadelphia, except when we stopped and a lanthorn or two showed us a ragged boy and the dark buildings of some New Jersey town" (*Journal* 7, 73). Qualifying the elaborate edifice reference, the key word "only" belies that the metaphor has sprung from the writer's enthusiasm. Thoreau was more probably bored stiff, having had to watch the same reflection for hours. He could not see anything of nature, and was instead reminded of a continuous building beyond his window. Travelling on from Philadelphia to New York by boat and rail two days later, he summed up the new journey: "Uninteresting, except the boat" (*Journal* 7, 75).

Back in Concord on December 8, Thoreau returned to his September worry:

Winter has come unnoticed by me, I have been so busy writing. This is the life most lead in respect to Nature. How different from my habitual one! It is hasty, coarse, and trivial, as if you were a spindle in a factory. The other is leisurely, fine, and glorious, like a flower. In the first case you are merely getting your living; in the second you live as you go along. You travel only on roads of the proper grade without jar or running off the track, and sweep round the hills by beautiful curves. (*Journal* 7, 80)

source of profit . . . from one of the cleanest, nicest, most entertaining and innoxious of pursuits" (*Paradise*, 11).

"From the doorsteps of the hut we landed on mother earth, for the verandas were not floored. Everything was as homely and simple and inexpensive as thought and thrift might contrive. Our desire to live in the open air became almost compulsory, for though you fly from civilisation and its thralls you cannot escape the social instincts of life. The hut became the focus of life other than human. . . . [G]rey bead-eyed geckoes craftily stalked moths and beetles and other fanatic worshippers of flame as they hastened to sacrifice themselves to the lamp. In the walls wasps built terra-cotta warehouses in which to store the semi-animate carcasses of spiders and grubs; a solitary bee constructed [a] nondescript comb among the books, transforming a favourite copy of *Lorna Doone* into a solid block. Bats, sharp-toothed, and with pin-point eyes, swooped in at one door, quartered the roof with brisk eagerness, and departed by the other" (*Paradise*, 20).

Beachcombing Instincts

"Before the rains came thundering on the iron roof of our little hut, the washed-out and enfeebled town-dweller who gave way to bitter reflections on the first evening of his new career, could hardly have been recognised, thanks to the robustious, wholesome effects of the free and vitalising life. Fourteen, frequently sixteen, hours of the twenty-four were spent in the open air, ashore and afloat. . . .

"Is there a human being, taking part in the rough and tumble of the world, who can honestly make confession and say that he has completely suffocated those inherent instincts of savagedom—joy and patience in the chase, the longing for excitement and surprise, the crude selfishness, the delight in getting something for nothing? Society journals have informed me that titled dames have been known to sit out long and wearisome evenings that they may obtain some paltry favour in a cotillion. And when the sea casts up its gifts on these radiant shores, I boldly and with glee give way to my Beachcombing instincts and pick and choose. Never up to the present have I found anything of real value; but am I not buoyed up by pious hopes and sanguine expectations? Is not the game as diverting and as innocent as many others that are played to greater profit? It is a game, too, that cannot be forced, and therefore cannot become demoralising; and having no nice feelings nor fine shades, I rejoice and am glad in it.

"And then what strange and varied things one sees! . . . Occasionally a case of fruit, washed from the decks of a labouring steamer, drifts ashore. One was the means of introducing a valuable addition to the products of the island. It gave demonstration of how man may unwittingly, and even in opposition to his wit, assist in scattering and multiplying blessings on a smiling land—blessings to last for all time, and perhaps to amend or ameliorate the environment of a budding nation. . . .

"Again, a German barque, driven out of its course, found unexpectedly a detached portion of the Great Barrier Reef 200 miles away to the south. When the south-easters came, they pounded away so vigorously with the heavy guns of the sea that in a brief space nothing was left of the big ship save some distorted fragments of iron jammed in among the nigger-heads of coral and the crevices of the rocks. A few weeks after, portions of the wreck were deposited on Dunk Island, and the beach of the mainland for miles was strewn with timber. That wreck was the greatest favour bestowed me in my profession of Beachcomber. . . .

"[T]he grating of the battered barque, upon which many a wet and weary steersman had stood, now fulfils placid duty as a front gate. . . .

"When there are eight or ten islands and islets within an afternoon's sail, and miles of mainland beach to police, variety lends her charms to the pursuit of the Beachcomber. Landing in one of the unfrequented coves, he knows not what the winds and the tides may have spread out for inspection and acceptance. Perhaps only an odd coconut from the Solomon Islands, its husk zoned with barnacles. The germ of life may yet be there. To plant the nut above high-water mark is an obvious duty. Perhaps there is a paddle, with rude tracery on the handle, from the New Hebrides, part of a Fijian canoe that has been bundled over the Barrier, a wooden spoon such as the Kanakas use. . . .

"A mind inclined to casuistry, could it not defend Beachcombing? Does not the law recognise it under the definition of trover? Why bother about the law and moralities when it is all so pleasing, so engrossing, and so fair?" (*Paradise*, 28-29).

Sounds, Silences and Scents

"Such is the silence of the bush that the silken rustle of the butterflies becomes audible" (*Paradise*, 58).

"Here on the verge of the ocean, at the extreme limit of the spit of soft, shell-enamelled sand, where the breakers had roared in angry monotone, the ears thrill with tender sounds. Though all the winds are dead, the undertones of the sea linger in lulling harmonies. The tepid tide on the warm sand crisply rustles and hisses as when satin is crumpled and smartly rent. Weird, resonant tappings, moans, and gurgles come from a hollow log drifting with infinite slowness. Broken sighs and gasps tell where the ripples advancing in echelon wander and lose their way among blocks of sandstone. As the tide rose it prattled and gurgled, toying with tinkling shells and clinking coral, each one separate and distinct, however thin and faint. My solitary watch⁷ gives the rare delight of analysing the night thoughts of the ocean, profound in its slumber though dreamily conscious of recent conflict with the winds. All the frail undertones suppressed during the bullying day now have audience. Sounds which crush and crowd have wearied and retired. The timid and shy venture forth to join the quiet revelry of the night" (*Paradise*, 59).

"It is night—the thoughtful, watchful, wakeful, guardian night, with no cloud to sully its tremulous radiance. How pretty a fable, I reflect, would the ancients have associated with the Southern Cross, shimmering there in the serene sky? Dare I, at this inspiring moment, attempt what they missed, merely because they lacked direct inspiration? Those who once lived in Egypt saw the sumptuous southern jewel, and it may again glitter vainly for the bewilderment of the Sphinx if the lazy world lurches through space long enough. Yes, let me invent a myth—and not tell it, but rather think of the origin of the Milky Way and so convince myself of the futility of modern inventions" (*Paradise*, 60).

"It is the season of scents, and the native, untended, unpampered plants are easily first in an uncatalogued competition. . . . Just now, in some situations, the old gold orchid rivals the mango in showiness and fragrance; the pencil orchid dangles white aigrettes from the trunks and branches of hundreds of trees, saturating the air with a subtle essence as of almonds and honey; and the hoya hangs festoons from rocks and trees in such lavish disregard of space and the breathings of less virile vegetation, that the sensual scent borders on the excessive. On the hill-tops, among rocks gigantic of mould and fantastic of shape, a less known orchid with inconspicuous flowers yields a perfume reminiscent of the violet; the shady places on the flats are showy with giant crinum lilies. . . .

"The most elemental of all incenses—that which arises from warm, dry soil sprinkled by a sudden shower—is undoubtedly invigorating. . . . An early or late arrival among flowers and fruit cannot be hailed or chidden where there is but trifling seasonal variation. Without beginning and without end, the perpetual motion of tropical vegetation is but slightly influenced by the weather. Who is to say that this plant is early or that late, when early or late, like Kiplings's east and west, are one?" (*Paradise*, 64).

"Many a time, home-returning at night—when the black contours of the Island loomed up in the distance against the pure tropic sky tremulous with myriads of unsullied stars—has its tepid fragrance drifted across the water as a salutation and a greeting. It has long been a fancy of mine that the Island has a distinctive odour, soft and pliant, rich and vigorous. Other mixtures of forest and jungle may smell as strong, but none has the rare blend which I recognise and gloat over whensoever, after infrequent absences for a day or two, I return to accept of it in grateful sniffs" (*Paradise*, 12).

"Birds and Their Rights"

"Sired by a sunbeam, born of a flower, gaiety its badge, might be said in fable of the sunbird, as in temperament and tint it parades its right to such parentage. . . . Garbed in rich olive green, royal blue, and bright yellow, and of a quick and lively disposition, small as he is, he is always before his public, never forgetful of his appearance, or regardless of his rights. Feeding on honey and on

insects which frequent honey-supplying flowers . . . he flutters and darts among the blooms, often sipping on the wing after the habit of the hummingbird—which he resembles even to the characteristic expansion of the tail feathers” (*Paradise*, 110).

“Australian, truly; but, unlike the emu, the black swan, the lyre-bird, the kookaburra, and others, the swap pheasant is not exclusively so. . . . Science seems somewhat bewildered by its contrarities; it is placed among the cuckoos, its formal title being *Centropus phasianinus*—pheasant-like spur-foot—while the approved vernacular name is a combination, pheasant-coucal. . . . This earthly psalmist of rare felicity in the expression of its emotions seems proud of its gifts and fond of exercising them. Harken now to the succession of full-sounding, slow, booming notes, accentuated by balanced rests, as if the vocalist were conscious of a flawless performance and studied it with the air of a libant, pausing between sips of the exquisite” (*Paradise*, 107).

“To work out its destiny the night-jar depends on secret doings and on flight soft as a falling leaf. It is a bird of the twilight and night” (*Paradise*, 112).

“On foot a hopeless cripple, on wing the picture of ease and race, the swiftlet heels in circles of varying radii . . . swift almost as light, as silent as dawn” (*Paradise*, 108).

“The scrub fowl is a sagacious bird, not only in the avoidance of the dismal duty of incubation, but in respect of the making of those great mounds of decaying vegetable matter and earth which perform the function so effectively. . . . Though much less in weight than an average domestic fowl, the egg that she lays equals nearly three of the fowl’s” (*Paradise*, 116).

Neighbouring Isles

“The islands immediately to the south-east form the [rest of] the Family group—triplets, twins and two singles. I like to think approving things of them; to note individual excellences; to familiarise myself with their distinguishing traits; to listen to them in their petulance and anger, and in that sobbing subsidence to even temper; to their complacent gurglings and sleepy murmurs. . . .

“The neighbouring islands include Timana, two and a half miles from the sandspit of Dunk Island. . . . A mile beyond Timana is Bedarra, with its lovely little bays and coves and fantastically weathered rocks, its forest and jungle and scrub, and its rocky satellite Peerahmah. . . . Toolghar three-quarters of a mile from Bedarra; Coomboo half a mile from Toolghar; and the group of three—Budjoo, Kurrumbah and Coolah—still further to the south-east” (*Paradise*, 70).

This Amplitude of Time and Space

“Whereas the average town-dweller could not endure the commonplaces of Nature which entertain me, rouse my wonder, enliven my imagination, and

gratify my inmost thoughts, so his pursuits are to me devoid of purpose, insipid, dismally unsatisfactory. To one whose everyday admission (apology if you like) is that he is not as other men are—fond of society and of society's occupations, pastimes, refinements, and (pardon) illusions—the unsoiled jungle is more desirable than all the prim parks and clipped gardens; all this amplitude of time and space than the one “crowded hour.”⁸

Notes

- 1 *Beachcomber's Paradise: Selections from the Writings of E.J. Banfield*, ed. James Porter (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1983). Page references to *Paradise* are cited parenthetically in the text. The selections for *Beachcomber's Paradise* were taken from all four Banfield books: *The Confessions of a Beachcomber* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1908); *My Tropic Isle* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1911); *Tropic Days* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1918); and *Last Leaves from Dunk Island* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Ltd., 1925).

Following the popular success of his first book, *The Confessions*, which went into several reprints, Banfield was besieged with requests for more—more detail about his settling on the island. The result was *My Tropic Isle* with much more description of his initial occupation of the isle, the building of his house, etc., as well as a chapter he called “A Plain Man's Philosophy” outlining some of the thinking which led to his abandoning society. The two later books contain mainly nature essays.

The sectional headings used for this pastiche are not those used by Banfield (with the one exception of “Birds and Their Rights”), but were invented for *Beachcomber's Paradise*. The selections here are a complex mixture, mostly from Banfield's first two books, rearranged in what seemed a more logical sequence; and therefore to cite each individual reference would unnecessarily clutter such a brief compilation.

- 2 The major part of Dunk Island is now a National Park, thanks to Banfield's early recommendations; there is a resort operating on the northern end of the isle where Banfield had his farm.
- 3 The nearby towns of Tully and Innisfail on the mainland have an annual rainfall of up to 4,000 millimetres, or 160 inches.
- 4 Tam O'Shanter Point is a forested headland on the mainland, four miles distant.
- 5 The casuarina tree, or beach sheoak, bears long, pinelike needle-leaves which sigh softly in the slightest breeze.
- 6 Purtaboi is the tiny islet half a mile offshore from the crescent of Brammo Bay, Banfield's home beach.
- 7 Banfield kept his “solitary watch”—from the protruding sandspit on the northwestern tip of the island—for the coming of the weekly steamer from Townsville with his much-looked-forward-to mail and groceries. The steamer would heave-to briefly out in deep water while Banfield rowed out to it in his dinghy, before it sailed on northwards to serve other islands and coastal towns.
- 8 Banfield, *The Confessions of a Beachcomber*, facsimile first (1908) edition, ed. Michael Noonan (Brisbane: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1994). This reprint edition of *The Confessions* is the only one of Banfield's books still in print.



Ralph Waldo Emerson
circa 1842

"The World Is a Divine Dream": Emerson's Subjective Idealism

David Lyttle

Ralph Waldo Emerson, when he was twenty-one years old, concluded that "the progress of Metaphysical philosophy may be found to consist in nothing else than the progressive introduction of apposite metaphors. Thus the Platonists congratulated themselves for ages upon their knowledge that Mind was a dark chamber whereon ideas like shadows were painted. Men derided this as infantile when they afterwards learned that the Mind was a sheet of white paper whereon any & all characters might be written."¹ Although perhaps not a great thinker in logic, Emerson was a great thinker in metaphor, clothing his abstract thought time and again in images. This essay treats Emerson's philosophy of subjective idealism: his development of this philosophy, and his expression of it in metaphors. And I contribute a metaphor of my own, the Theater of True Dream. This metaphor, although anachronistic, was suggested to me by some of Emerson's light imagery, and helps to clarify his thought.

I consider, first, how the skepticism of George Berkeley and David Hume influenced Emerson in his designation of the external world as appearance only. Second, I examine Emerson's rejection of the idea of a "personal God" (defined for purposes of this essay as an infinite conscious Being distinct and separate from his creations, including man) and Emerson's insistence, based, he said, on intuition or a-rational knowledge, that there is an ineffable identity of God (or the Universal) and man (or the individual), that, in truth, the two are not two, but One. His philosophy, therefore, is monistic. He held that there is only one substance or fundamental reality, namely, the subject or "Soul," which is at once individual and Universal.² Third, I consider Emerson's theme that the inner world (the subject) creates the outer world (the object). He has various kinds of metaphors that express this theme—some of organicism, such as a seed putting forth its flowers, some of liquidity, such as ripples enlarging from a center, and some of light, such as the sun radiating its beams. I argue that this theme, in

conjunction with his theory of the identity of God and man, and his designation of nature as phenomenal, led directly to his conclusion that God creates the external world through the individual. Fourth, I discuss subjective idealism in *Nature* and in "The Transcendentalist." Fifth, I examine how the emergence in *Nature* of a great organic metaphor marks Emerson's transition from objective idealism to subjective idealism or what he called "spiritualism." Sixth, I discuss how Emerson solved the problem of solipsism when he discarded the idea of a personal God and reduced nature to the creation of mind.

The World as Idea

When he was twenty years old, Emerson asked his Aunt Mary: "Who is he that can stand up before him [David Hume] & prove the existence of the Universe, & of its Founder?"³ The young man at first pretended to be a skeptic about the reality of the external world, but soon realized that in fact the only thing he knew with certainty was himself. Later, he informed his Aunt: "I know that I exist, but the age and the Universe are alike abstractions of my own mind, and have no pretensions to the same definitive certainty."⁴ And in an early undated prose fragment, he observed, commenting on the "Ideal Theory," that "it is an interesting inquiry, to examine our knowledge of [the] material world. . . . What are the foundations of our belief of its existence [?]" The senses, he continued, tell us about an external world, but

there is no reason why your senses should not be deceived [sic]. . . . Are you sure that you are not dreaming now? . . . The senses cannot ascertain their own truth or their relation to the qualities which so affect them and of which they inform the mind. It is manifest, then that we have no knowledge of the substances which affect the senses. . . . Perhaps there are a multitude of minds in a corner of space deeming themselves surrounded with bodies and a vast universe which exists alone in their own imaginations. Perhaps space is peopled with these little assemblies of disembodied dreamers.⁵

The recognition by Emerson that he could not absolutely prove that the actual world (in spite of its beauty and practical value) was as real as he, that he could not prove that he did not dream his world, and that he could not prove that he was not alone with his world, was deep and long lasting. In 1827, when he was studying for his divinity degree, he could even joke about these ideas, once using them humorously to tease his brother Charles:

As you exist to yourself & as you exist to me, you are two persons, darling. I, as may be proved, have no knowledge, & of course, no care of thy real existence, thy consciousness. I know not what thou art. You may be full of pains &

hypocrisies or daemons. . . . You may be a wandered angel. . . . With all this I have no manner of concern. . . . But to me, you exist only for my use & behoof. I am to make of you an instrument of pleasure as much as I can. . . . I write to thee not as thou art but as I am able to make thee appear. I am not affectionate to thee but to my image of thee. When I praise or admire or love thee, in terms, be perfectly assured it is not thine but mine which I applaud. And be sure that this tractate is no rag of Pyrrho nor yet of Berkley [sic] but a sweet tissue of my own, of which the warp was taken from the one, & the woof from the other. . . . I leave you to demolish my cobweb in your next letter.⁶

Consequently, by the time he was twenty-four, Emerson was well on his way in developing the "cobweb" of his youthful skepticism about the reality of the objective world into the steel framework of his subjective idealism. In 1834 he wrote his brother Edward that "philosophy affirms that the outward world is only phenomenal . . . an intricate dream—the exhalation of the present state of the Soul."⁷ By the autumn of 1836, he had written *Nature* in which he argued, especially in the chapter "Idealism," that nature is what we might call *true dream*. And two years after that in the lecture "Love," he observed:

In strict philosophy there is a quite infinite distance between our knowledge of our own existence and the evidence we have for the existence of nature including that of other persons. In Logic the position of the Idealist is inexpugnable who persists in regarding men as appearances and phantoms merely which represent to him his own ideas in the masquerade of forms like his own. But when we treat Human Life . . . we must descend from this high ground of absolute science and converse with things as they appear.⁸

Various critics disparage Emerson's idealism, for one reason or another. Stephen E. Whicher, for example, refers to the "rapt repudiation of the outer world . . . [that was] a powerful recurrent movement in Emerson's spirit, in his earlier as in his later years," and has some disparaging things to say about his "technique of victory by disengagement." But Emerson's idealism was more than simply a "recurrent movement" of his temperament; it was the framework of his entire outlook on life.⁹ And he hardly repudiated "the outer world." In practical affairs (as the previous quotation indicates), he balanced his idealism with his pragmatism, treating nature as though it were real. In philosophy he argued that although nature is not fundamental reality, it is the necessary expression of spirit. He sought to nullify the tyranny, not the discipline, of the object. In answer to Whicher's criticism that Emerson used his idealism to gain "victory by disengagement," one might reply that the wise man knows that sometimes discretion is the better part of valor, that sometimes one should retreat from the dark and terrible to regroup his resources and prepare for a return to the field of battle with greater strength, more subtle strategies.

Joel Porte comments that "Emerson was driven to accept the Ideal theory because he found sense experience distasteful, but not at all because he really believed the world was an illusion."¹⁰ This is difficult to believe on both counts. With the possible exceptions of his deafness to music and his commonplace Victorian prudishness about sex, Emerson delighted in sense experiences, such as eating, walking in nature, sailing on the ocean. Apparently critics of his own time leveled the same charge, but he denied it: "I see with as much pleasure as another a field of corn or a rich pasture, whilst I dispute their absolute being. Their phenomenal being, I no more dispute than I do my own. I do not dispute but point out the just way of viewing them" (*JMN*, 5:124). And he believed that the "just way of viewing them," we have said, is to view them as true dream.

The twentieth-century reader may smile cynically at the statement in *Nature* that "the advantage of the ideal theory over the popular faith [in the substantiality of matter], is this, that it presents the world in precisely that view which is most desirable to the mind."¹¹ But why should one assume that a true philosophy should not be desirable to the mind? Two facts are (1) that Emerson believed that spirit is primary to matter and (2) that he and the world belonged together. In addition, the ideal theory was, for him at least, most congenial to his constitutional sensitivity to the existential solitude and divine dignity of the individual. In sum, Emerson's early skepticism about the reality of "the outer world" became the foundation of his mature philosophy. He said in 1839: "There are degrees in idealism. We learn first to play with it academically. . . . Then we see in the heyday of youth & poetry that it may be true. . . . Then its countenance waxes stern & grand, & we see that it must be true. It now shows itself ethical & practical. We learn that God Is; that he is in <us> me; & that all things are shadows of him" (*JMN*, 7:215-16).

The Inner Universal

Emerson may be characterized as a religious atheist when an atheist is defined as a person who does not believe in a personal God, and when a religious person is defined as someone who believes that the material world is created by and dependent upon spiritual reality. But whether or not one wishes to characterize him this way, Emerson's skepticism about the reality of "the outer world" correlates with his skepticism about the existence of an external personal deity. He noted in 1836: "Oct. 19. As long as the soul seeks an external God, it never can have peace. it always must be uncertain what may be done & what may become of it" (*JMN*, 5:223). Several observations remind the reader of his position.

Emerson was profoundly influenced by the English philosophic idealist George Berkeley. Berkeley, defending the hypothesis of a personal God, argued that although the existence of the external world depended upon perception, most of it did not depend upon *his* (Berkeley's) perception. Rather, it depended upon

the perception of a mind other than his, that mind being God. The twentieth-century English philosopher G. J. Warnock writes:

Berkeley finds that, of some of his ideas, he can suppose that his own mind is the cause. "It is no more than willing, and straightway this or that idea arises in my fancy." This, however, does not take him far; for he finds that "the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will." I can, within limits, decide what to look at or listen to; but if I look out of my window in broad daylight, I cannot then decide what to *see*. The world outside is simply there to be seen, and I cannot choose but see it so long as I look. Such ideas I then have are not "creatures of my will." "There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them." This spirit, Berkeley concludes, can only be God.¹²

Emerson not only agreed with Berkeley that most of "the ideas actually perceived by sense" did not depend upon the ego, but affirmed also that he was often inspired by power beyond his conscious will. He stated in the "Over-Soul": "Man is a stream whose source is hidden. . . . I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine" (CW, 2:159). However, certainly by the late thirties, he had come to disagree with Berkeley that "some other will or spirit," distinct and separate from him, created "the ideas actually perceived by sense," and was the origin of religious and aesthetic inspiration. His experience was not of such a spirit; and he would not accept on hearsay that such a spirit existed. Consequently, he concluded that the "extraordinary power" that created and, to a large extent, controlled nature, although greater than his ego and "beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect" (CW, 3:16, 15), was not other than he, and that, therefore, the Being he was, was far greater than he had been aware. Indeed, he gradually became convinced that he and God, the individual and the Universal, were one identity.¹³

That Emerson gradually but firmly rejected the idea of a personal God is evidenced by the fact that he stopped praying in a conventional sense. His daughter Ellen recalled: "Now began what Mother called Transcendental Times. Either now [about 1840] or earlier Father gave up family prayers. . . . Now it was clear to her [Lidian] that he was not a Christian in her sense of the word, and it was a most bitter discovery."¹⁴ In "Self-Reliance" Emerson wrote that "Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good" (CW, 2:44). Prayer, for the mature Emerson, was not person to Person communication but Being relishing Being, the individual/Universal meditating upon itself, the individual abandoning egotism for the inherent wisdom of "the nature of things. . . . As the traveller who has lost his way, throws his reins on his horse's neck, and trusts to the instinct of the animal to find his road, so we must do with the divine animal who carries us through this world" (CW, 3:15-16).

Needless to say, Emerson's theory of the identity of God and man was (and is) extremely radical, even within his liberal religious tradition. Ellis Gray Loring remarked (about 1838) that Emerson "does not believe, or rather he positively *disbelieves* in anything out of himself. He carries idealism to the Extreme, Consequently if there is a God, he is God. God & he are one."¹⁵ And Whicher writes that "the simple key to his [Emerson's] mature faith and strength . . . was the knowledge that the soul of man does not merely, as had long been taught, contain a spark or drop or breath or voice of God; it *is* God." Emerson was not interested, as were the rationalistic Unitarians, in merely sharing attributes with a personal God. He sought above all, Whicher says, "what Edwards, what New Englanders, had always wanted, an *assured salvation*, not simply moral capacity."¹⁶ He found this salvation neither in prayer to, nor in glorification of, another person, but (as W. R. Inge phrases it in another context) in "something much closer than an ethical harmony of two mutually exclusive wills."¹⁷

In his journal for 1837, Emerson recorded (but not surprisingly did not deem expedient to proclaim publicly in a sermon or a lecture) that "in certain moments I have known that I existed directly from God, and am, as it were, his organ. And in my ultimate consciousness Am He" (*JMN*, 5:337). But the truth of the matter is that he soon realized that the Being he was was more than this—that he was more than God. He assured himself in 1840: "Do not imagine that the Universe is somewhat so vague & aloof that a man cannot be willing to die for it. If that lives, I live. I am the Universe. The Universe is the externisation [sic.] of God. Wherever he is, that bursts into appearance around him. The sun, the stars, physics & chemistry we sensually treat as if they were selfexistences [sic] and do not yet see that these are the retinue of that Being we are" (*JMN*, 7:542).

When Emerson said that he was "the Universe," he made an inclusive, not an exclusive, statement. He denied (while at the same time celebrating the individual and preaching self-reliance) that he was King of the universe, self-elected to impose his private ego-will on any other aspect of the universe. When he said that he was the universe he meant that he was literally the entire universe, the whole kit and caboodle: God, Ralph Waldo, and all nature, including his own body and all other people. In fact, he believed not only that the Being he was was the universe, but that there was no other universe but the one he was. In 1842, just after his son Waldo died, Samson Reed spoke to him of "the other world." "Other world?" Emerson snorted in reply, "there is no other world; here or nowhere is the whole fact" (*JMN*, 8:183). He insisted that he was, that each individual is, all reality, here, now, that there is nothing else but your universe, that this is the Being you are, in all its mysteriousness, that there is nothing else upon which to rely, and that you had better treat the universe as you do your immediate body, with awe and consideration. In short, Emerson sought a philosophy that conceptualized his intuition that he was one with, that he *was*, all Being, all fundamental reality. He came to believe that Being is a bipolar monism of subject and object, that the subject (the Soul transcending time and space) is, paradoxically, at once the

individual and the Universal, and that the temporal and spatial object (nature) is the creation of the subject and has no substantial existence but is appearance only.

Subjective Idealism

In the previously quoted letter of 1827 to Charles, Emerson claimed that his philosophic position was eclectic, taken from the skeptics and Berkeley, with a "sweet tissue" of his own added. What was this "sweet tissue"? Critics agree that Emerson was not an original thinker in schematic abstractions; and he would have agreed with thanks. But he was an original thinker insofar as he dared to hold steadily to subjective idealism against the disbelieving community of common sense, and insofar as he added to the American tradition of idealism the idea that experience is created by the Universal through the individual or by the two together.

All of the members of the Transcendental Club, including the charter members—George Ripley, Frederic Hedge, Bronson Alcott, Convers Francis, James Freeman Clarke, Orestes Brownson—were philosophic idealists who held that matter is the creation of mind. And all of the members of the Club, including those who later joined, such as Theodore Parker and even Samuel Johnson, were, except for Emerson (and possibly the early Alcott), theists who believed that God is an "infinite person," an objective Being distinct and separate from His creations of men and nature. Emerson, however, unlike the others, held that God is impersonal and "within," and that God creates the "outer" world through or in conjunction with the individual. In fact, this conclusion must follow from his belief in an impersonal inner God. Thus his idealism differs sharply from that of the other Transcendentalists, and may be called "subjective" in distinction to "objective" idealism.¹⁸

In *Nature*, in the section "Spirit," Emerson presents us with an original organic metaphor of subjective idealism: the divine spirit "does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves. Therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old" (CW, 1:38). Indeed, throughout his work, Emerson presents variations of this theme of the "inner" creating the "outer." A few examples follow. He observed in "The Over-Soul" that "the Highest dwells with him [the individual]; . . . the sources of nature are in his own mind" (CW, 2:174). In the journal he stated that "all nature is only the foliage, the flowering, & the fruit of the Soul and . . . every part therefore exists as an emblem & sign, of some fact in the soul" (JMN, 5:366). "The Soul contains in itself the event that shall presently befall [sic] it for the event is only the actualization of its thoughts" (JMN, 5:371). And in a later journal entry, he wrote: "Man in nature [is] a suction pipe through which the world flows. No force but is his force" (JMN, 12:238).

Elsewhere he affirmed that "poetry begins, or all becomes poetry when we look from the centre outward, and are using all as if the mind made it. That only can we see which we are, and which we make."¹⁹ In general, the idea that the outer world grows out of the inner world, as a flower grows from a seed, expresses Emerson's "organic" philosophy.

But the metaphor I offer here to help clarify the thought of Emerson is not "organic" but based on his preoccupation with the act of seeing and is suggested by many of his metaphors of light, especially by his memorable statement in "The Over-Soul" that "from within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all" (CW, 2:161). I call this metaphor Emerson's Theater of True Dream.²⁰ The triadic motif for this Theater is: God is the Light, the individual is the lens, and nature is the picture. We, as individuals, sit in our seats, alone, each of us a lens through whom the Light is projected to produce before us the apparent world of nature. The individual (each of us as subject) watches the interplay of his body with other bodies (as objects) as they appear as phenomena before him on the screen. The individual does not experience other individuals directly. Acquaintances, friends, even lovers, are to each other not substantial but appearance only, images on the screen.²¹ There is always something unreal about them; they are part of the Not Me, of nature. In truth, all relationships for Emerson are phenomenal, not real. Hence the Theater is like a movie house, not like a theater of stage plays or plays in the round; there is no direct give-and-take between the individual and the figures on the screen. There is only the Light (the Universal), the lens (the individual), and the images. This Theater, Emerson would say, is the one world of You; You alone are real; "all other men" are phenomenal. Emerson affirms solitude as a given condition of Being, the signature of divinity, the ground of self-reliance.

In the Theater of True Dream, the Light and the lens are reality, and the picture (nature) is appearance. No one part of this triadic motif of his monism can be separated from the other two, or the theater goes dark. The ontological progression from the Light through the lens to the picture is from the Universal through the individual to phenomenal events of the picture, from eternity to space-time, from subjectivity to objectivity, from within to without. Although this metaphor of the Theater hardly solves all the problems of Emerson, it acknowledges his claim of the ineffable identity of God and man; it acknowledges his skepticism about the substantiality of matter; it acknowledges the "consanguinity" he felt between the individual and nature; it acknowledges his motif of the individual (as transcendental subject) at the center of nature; and it acknowledges his belief that the individual has a necessary and critical role in the creation of the outer world. The individual, for Emerson, is where creation occurs; without the individual nothing would exist.

Subjective Idealism in *Nature* and "The Transcendentalist"

In *Nature*, in the chapter "Idealism," Emerson argues against a dualism and for a monism of mind and matter. His position is that spirit creates matter, and that, therefore, matter, although necessary, is subservient to spirit. However, in the following chapter, "Spirit," he seems to have reservations about idealism. But he is not inconsistent; he is speaking about two kinds of idealism. In fact, *Nature* is a statement of his philosophy in progress. His developing thought about philosophic idealism and his related emotional tension, at this point in his career, are as follows.

In "Spirit" he says that idealism should be abandoned 1) if it "leaves God out of me," and 2) if it "leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end" (CW, 1:37), but calls idealism "a useful introductory hypothesis" (CW, 1:38) because, as he has shown in the preceding chapter, it supports his fundamental philosophic belief that mind, not matter, is reality. Now, it is evident that when he advises that idealism should be abandoned when it "leaves God out of me," he is referring to objective idealism, like Berkeley's, which (in Emerson's view) does leave God out of him by positing a personal God distinct and separate from men. He therefore believes that objective idealism should be abandoned and replaced by what he calls "spiritualism" and what, in this essay, is called "subjective idealism" that places God within. In regard to the second point, we shall see later how Emerson's version of subjective idealism saved him from the labyrinthian fantasy of his private ego.

Also in the chapter "Spirit," Emerson complains that "the heart resists" idealism because it "balks [sic] the affections by denying substantive being to men and women" (CW, 1:37-38). Here, he is obviously referring to subjective idealism, because in objective idealism, again like Berkeley's, "men and women" are assumed to have substantive being; they are separate and distinct spirits created by God. But, as we have seen, in subjective idealism (which is monistic), "other people" belong to nature, and thus are appearance only. However, Emerson does not say that subjective idealism should be abandoned; he says only that the "heart resists" it, demanding otherness.

Consequently, we find in "Spirit," as we do throughout his work, tension in Emerson between the inner God and the outer world, between the Me and the Not Me (including other people). He would like to give equal value to both, and usually caters to this desire by falling back on his concept of the "double consciousness." But in the final analysis, he cannot give equal value to both: the Me, the creator, has priority over the Not Me, the created. Thus he chooses, under tension, the inner God over the phenomenal world. He gives priority to the intuition of assured salvation over problematic relations with other people. His lament in "Experience" that grief over his son's death can teach him nothing of "real nature," for example, testifies memorably to this priority (CW, 3:29). He

half wished otherwise, but his beloved Waldo, as a phenomenon, did not have equal value with the noumenal inner world. He wrote Caroline Sturgis that "this fact [Waldo's death] takes no more deep hold than other facts, is as dreamlike as they; a lambent flame that will not burn playing on the surface of my river."²²

A passage in "The Transcendentalist," his philosophic manifesto of 1841, in which he reaffirmed his original ideas in *Nature* and *Essays: First Series*, exhibits also the tension Emerson felt between the divine and human worlds. Moreover, it illustrates difficulties of language with which he was faced in trying to communicate his radical thought, and it presents another fine metaphor of his subjective idealism. First, he writes that "the idealist has another measure, which is metaphysical, namely, the *rank* which things themselves take in his consciousness; not at all, the size or appearance. Mind is the only reality, of which men and all other natures are better or worse reflectors. Nature, literature, history, are only subjective phenomena" (CW, 1:203). The reader should not be led astray by his language. Since he held that subjectivity is reality, the terminology of the last sentence appears to be at odds with his philosophy. To have been consistent, he should have said that nature, literature, history are only *objective* phenomena. (What he means, of course, is that the reality of "nature, literature, and history" depends upon the interpreter.) But here, as elsewhere, he sacrifices technicalities of his philosophy to communication with his layman audiences.

Second, Emerson speaks about the tension he feels between himself and society: "Although in his [the Transcendentalist's] action overpowered by the laws of action, and so, warmly cooperating with men, even preferring them to himself, yet when he [the Transcendentalist] speaks scientifically, or after the order of thought [after his metaphysical ranking referred to above], he is constrained to degrade persons into representatives of truths" (CW, 1:203). Thus Emerson, from the high subjective perspective, is forced against the protests of human affection and love of cooperation with others, to "degrade" persons to an ontological ranking lower than the ranking the Understanding gives them; he sees them to be "representatives of truths," not truths themselves.²³

Third, he then gives another metaphor of subjective idealism. The Transcendentalist's "thought,—that is the Universe. His experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world, as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in himself, centre alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Centre of him" (CW, 1:203). And in his journal, around this time, Emerson noted that "the world flows ever from the soul" (JMN, 7:499; 1840). Thus the individual, in the triadic motif, is between reality and appearance; he is the lens between the Light and the picture.

In short, Emerson, in his subjective idealism, relinquished the idea that there are real persons with substantial relations. He placed the Universal "within," assuring himself of salvation and "degrading" men and women on the "outside" to

appearance only. But although he made this decision firmly and lastingly, he made it reluctantly. His remark that idealism “baulks the affections” expresses his sensitivity to the psychological dangers of philosophically relegating the warm momentary outer world to dream. Of course, he said that in practice we should “treat the men and women well: treat them as if they were real: perhaps they are” (CW, 3:35). Indeed, he himself celebrated each (apparent) individual as an incarnation of the Universal.

The Emergence in *Nature* of a Great Metaphor, and the Transition from Idealism to “Spiritualism”

Emerson remarked in the chapter “Language,” in *Nature*, that “a man conversing in earnest . . . will find that always a material image, more or less luminous, arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought” (CW, 1:20). The contention in this essay is that the metaphor, in the chapter “Spirit,” about the “Supreme Being” putting nature “forth through us” (CW, 1:38), written in the summer of 1836, is Emerson’s first definitive “vestment” of his subjective idealism. This metaphor anchors in nature his abstract speculations that the inner deity creates the external world though the individual.

Are there in *Nature* signs of development toward subjective idealism earlier than chapter seven, “Spirit”? The key to Emerson’s unique idealism is the triadic motif: God-man-nature, Light-lens-picture, not God-nature-man, as in objective idealism. Following are selected statements in *Nature*, which precede “Spirit,” and which are compatible with objective idealism but which do not contain the required triadic motif. In chapter four, “Language,” Emerson states: “Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact” (CW, 1:18); “This relation between mind and matter is not fancied by some poet, but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men” (CW, 1:22); “A Fact is the end or last issue of spirit” (CW, 1:22). The statement that “man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life” (CW, 1:18), with the word “behind,” might be said to give a shadowy adumbration of the triadic motif.

In chapter five, “Discipline,” Emerson says that “Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve” (CW, 1:25). This statement, like the ones above, does not necessitate his theme of subjective idealism; each of them can be (and usually is, when thought about at all) interpreted to refer to the conventional ideas that a personal God made nature independent of man, and that nature is the medium, external to man, through which God communicates to his created creatures.

In chapter six, “Idealism,” Emerson takes a more subjective stance. He questions the substantiality of nature, stating that “Reason” or spiritual vision “shows us nature aloof, and, as it were, afloat” (CW, 1:30). The effect of this statement is to psychologize the material world, to suggest that its ontology is

relative to, or dependent upon, the mind, that nature, rightly seen, is ethereal and dreamlike, not a substance in itself. "If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them. The best, the happiest moments of life, are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God" (CW, 1:30). These statements are still within the domain of objective idealism, but now the spatial positions of God, man, and nature, in the triadic motif, are shifting and vague. Who or what, for instance, is nature's "God"?—certainly not an external personal God. So where is God now—within man? Man is coming to be the center of attention. Man is whom nature floats before.

Near the end of "Idealism," Emerson states decisively that "Idealism sees the world in God," and presents us with a metaphor, beautiful in its elusiveness, that nature is "one vast picture, which God paints on the instant eternity, for the contemplation of the soul" (CW, 1:36). Then, in the following chapter, "Spirit," we are informed that nature "always speaks of Spirit. . . . It is a great shadow pointing always to the sun behind us" (CW, 1:37). And this metaphor provides the triadic key we are looking for (God-man-nature), and is the first real hint of subjective idealism in *Nature*.

Emerson had transposed the above metaphor from a journal entry for June 7: nature "is the great shadow pointing to an unseen Sun" (JMN, 5:171). But this early version of the metaphor does not fulfill the triadic motif. In it, man is not mentioned, and nature is "a great shadow" of what?—of Platonic realities, as in the passage Emerson had written earlier in life, when he was first reading Plato: "Mind was a dark chamber whereon ideas like shadows were painted"? (JMN, 2:225). But when Emerson added the words "behind us" to the metaphor (when he put it into *Nature*) he made a subtle but major shift in perspective; he created a new vision. He placed man ("us") between the sun and nature, thereby assuring man of his role in creation, and fulfilling the triadic motif of subjective idealism. Furthermore, Emerson followed the original metaphor in the journal with observations that point to the version in *Nature*: "Certainly children believe in an external world. The belief that it *appears* only, is an afterthought but on the human faculties if cultured this will as surely dawn as did the first faith. . . . The man is creator of his world" (JMN, 5:172).

Several paragraphs later in *Nature*, after the above metaphor with the triadic motif, Emerson wrote that "the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us" (CW, 1:38). And this image in *Nature* was also preceded by an earlier version in the journal. On July 30, 1836, he had written: "Man is the point wherein matter & spirit meet & marry. The Idealist says, God paints the world around your soul. The spiritualist saith, Yea, but lo! God is within you. The self of self creates the world through you, & organizations like you. The Universal Central Soul comes to the surface in my body" (JMN,

5:187). In addition, Emerson, in this passage, equates the terms "idealist" and "spiritualist" with objective and subjective idealism. And this supports my contention that he presents in the "Idealism" and "Spirit" chapters in *Nature* the development of his thought from objective to subjective idealism.

Further evidence that Emerson developed his theory of "spiritualism" in the summer of 1836 is his journal entry for June 22: "Mr. Alcott has been here with his Olympian dreams. He is a world-builder. Ever more he toils to solve the problem, Whence is the World? . . . The Whole,—Nature proceeding from himself, is what he studies" (*JMN*, 5:178). Evidently Emerson and Alcott had been discussing the general theme of the inward creating the outward, and were in agreement about raising it to a cosmic level.²⁴ Later in the same journal entry, Emerson, doubtless inspired by his dialogue with Alcott, wrote: "Man is the dwarf of himself[.] Is it not true that spirit in us is dwarfed by clay? that once Man was permeated & dissolved by spirit? He filled Nature with his overflowing currents. Out of him sprang the sun & moon" (*JMN*, 5:179). This is the early draft of the famous passage in the last chapter of *Nature*, in which he goes on to say that "the laws of his [man's] mind, the periods of his actions externized [sic.] themselves into day and night, into the year and the seasons" (*CW*, 1:42)—certainly a statement of "spiritualism."

How much Alcott helped Emerson formulate his subjective idealism, we probably shall never know. But Alcott, without question, was that "certain poet" whom Emerson mentions a few paragraphs earlier in "Spirit" (*CW*, 1:41), who sang to him, and whom he used as a persona to put before the public a poetic statement that expressed a philosophic speculation he was taking very seriously. In any case, the evidence is that Emerson reached, certainly in metaphor, a definitive position on subjective idealism between June 7 and July 30, or a little later, in the summer of 1836.

Emerson Solves a Problem of Solipsism

Originally, Emerson had planned to write one essay entitled "Nature," and to follow this essay with another entitled "Spirit," and then to make one book, entitled *Nature*, out of these two essays. This book was to be (and was) published in the fall of 1836. By the late spring and early part of the summer of that year, he had not yet completed "Spirit." While he was working on this essay, he apparently realized that he had a problem in uniting the two essays, "Nature" and "Spirit." On August 8, 1836, just before he finished the final draft of *Nature*, he wrote his brother William that "the book of Nature still lies on the table. There is, as always, one crack in it not easy to be soldered or welded."²⁵

The problem Emerson had in mind, when he wrote William, was not how to relate soul and nature. His philosophy, I have said, is not a dualism of two radically different substances, mind and matter, but a bipolar monism, consisting

in the two poles of subject and object, the latter pole being the expression of the former. as his theory of correspondence, which he discusses in the first part of *Nature*, and which he championed the rest of his life, demands. Moreover, he was fully accustomed to thinking of nature as a creation of mind for over a decade before he wrote *Nature*.

Possibly the problem he had in mind was about the discrepancy between the ideal and actual worlds, between the idealistic assumption that the world is made for man and the reality of natural evil. This problem is the bane of most theologies, including Emerson's, and was suddenly driven home to him by the death of his brother Charles on May 9, 1836. But since this was already a major problem for him, created by the traumatic death of his first love, Ellen, five years earlier, I doubt that he would have referred to it as a mere "crack."

I suggest that his problem (if, in fact, he had one) was about his rejection, around this time, of the idea of a personal God. More exactly, it was about how he could hold at once, first, that a personal God does not exist; second, that mind creates matter; and third, that nature was not his private dream. In other words, his problem was how in theory he could escape the conclusion that the whimsical and exclusive ego was in charge of "the nature of things" (CW, 1:37) when he discarded the idea of an external God and still retained the idea that nature is the creation of mind. I suggest that he closed this problem for himself by giving his amorphous meditations the "vesture" of his metaphor, in *Nature*, of subjective idealism.

Emerson's transition from objective idealism (inappropriate to his intuition of the identity of God and man) to subjective idealism (appropriate to that intuition) is demonstrated by the difference between the paragraph in "Spirit" about idealism balking the affections (CW, 1:37-38), and the following one containing his organic metaphor of nature being put "forth through us" (CW, 1:38). The sequence of thoughts in the two paragraphs runs as follows: "Idealism saith: matter is phenomenon, not a substance. Idealism acquaints us with the total disparity between the evidence of our own being, and the evidence of the world's being. The one is perfect [our existence is self-evident]; the other, incapable of any assurance [the reality of nature is problematic]; the mind is part of the nature of things" (CW, 1:37). In other words, idealism taught Emerson that spirit is real and that matter is appearance only. The statement that "the mind is part of the nature of things" simply expresses his idea that mind is not an accident of the material world but a necessary part; it is, in truth, the creator of that world.

Emerson then states that "the world is a divine dream, from which we may presently awake to the glories and certainties of day" (CW, 1:37). That is, for the idealist, the beauty of the world is a hint and foreshadowing of a higher reality. But then, next, he complains, as we have seen, that, on the one hand, idealism "leaves God out of me" (objective idealism), and, on the other, idealism leaves me "in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end" (solipsistic

idealism). In addition, he records his belief that idealism “baulks the affections in denying substantive being to men and women,” and his belief that (objective) idealism even fails to “account for that consanguinity which we acknowledge to it [nature]” (CW, 1:38). Thus Emerson states 1) that nature is a symbol of mind or higher reality, and 2) that idealism is “a useful hypothesis” as a first step in a true philosophy, for it posits mind over matter. But then he realized that positing mind over matter does not take him far enough in the direction he wishes to go. That direction is away from the theism of a personal God and toward a philosophy of the identity of God and man. And this raised another problem: If a personal God does not exist, whose mind creates matter? Ralph Waldo seemed to be left alone in a world of the solipsistic ego “to wander without end.”

In the next paragraph in “Spirit,” Emerson repeats a series of questions, leaving out the question “What is matter?” because he has surely answered that it is phenomenal. He asks again: “Whence is it [nature]?” His answer is that it comes from spirit. But, again, whose spirit? Certainly not his ego; nature cannot be a self-reverberating echo of the mere ego. If nature is a significant and trustworthy symbolic message from which the human consciousness can learn, it must be the creation of the ground of Being or universal spirit. But such a spirit, Emerson is now convinced, is not a personal God. Where, then, does nature come from? And suddenly he realizes the startling implication of his growing conviction that God is “within.” For if God is within, nature must come from within; it must be a message from the infinite part of “his own” Being, beyond consciousness. Consequently, he writes that “the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us.”

* * * * *

The logic of the above great metaphor guarantees that nature (including other people), although phenomenal, is not a text concocted by the ego but the divine language of the inner Universal. *Nature, for Emerson, is true dream.* It is dream because it is phenomenal. And it is true because 1) it is the creation of God and man, 2) the laws of the Universal apply equally to every aspect of the Whole, and therefore 3) the ego-will is not privileged over the rest of nature. In these two paragraphs, one relives Emerson’s successful struggle of imagination to learn by metaphor how to define the world as *your world* but *not the world of your ego*—your world, but not yours in selfishness. He thereby replaced Plato’s metaphor in which the “Mind is a dark chamber whereon ideas like shadows were painted,” and replaced Locke’s metaphor in which “the Mind was a sheet of white paper whereon any & all characters might be written” (JMN, 2:225) with his own metaphors of “spiritualism.” These metaphors, mainly of organicism and of light, add emotional depth to his celebration of the individual, and express most coherently and comprehensively the deepest levels of his philosophy after 1836.

Notes

- 1 *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman et al., 16 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960-1982), 2:224-25; 1824. Hereafter designated in the text as *JMN*.
- 2 See my essay, "Emerson's Transcendental Individualism" in *The Concord Saunterer*, N.S. Volume 3 (Fall 1995), 89-103.
- 3 *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939), 1:138.
- 4 *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, 10 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910-1914), 2:101.
- 5 *Letters*, 6:337-38.
- 6 *Letters*, 1:214; October 10, 1827.
- 7 *Letters*, 1:412; May 31, 1834.
- 8 *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ., 1959, 1964, 1972), 3:56.
- 9 Stephen E. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1953; rpt. New York: Barnes, 1961), 133-34. Whicher gives the impression that Emerson rejected his idealism after the early forties. But in fact, Whicher does not say this. He says that "Emerson moved from a subjective *toward* an objective idealism" [*italics mine*] (141). He is correct. I believe that Emerson did not disown his idealism in his later years, or even his subjective idealism. But I do not have room here to elaborate on what Whicher means, and so leave that for a future essay.
- 10 Joel Porte, "Nature as Symbol: Emerson's Noble Doubt," *New England Quarterly* 37 (December 1964): 462.
- 11 *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson, 5 vols. to date (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), 1:36. Hereafter designated in the text as *CW*.
- 12 G. L. Warnock, *Berkeley* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1953), 89.
- 13 David Robinson believes that Emerson recognized that "the experience of mystical timelessness could not be summoned at will . . . which implied that the experience was the product of a will separate from his own, and therefore beyond his control," and concludes that Emerson's position marks a loss of "self-reliance" and shows "a clear affinity with the [Calvinistic] doctrines of elect but irresistible grace" ("The Legacy of Channing: Culture as a Religious Category in New England Thought," *Harvard Theological Review* 74 [1981]: 237, 238).

It is true that Emerson believed that an individual can only prepare himself psychologically, read nature, and wait passively for revelatory voices (as artists and other creative persons prepare themselves for, and listen to, the voices of their unconscious). But to say that these voices for Emerson were "the product of a will separate from his own" is misleading. To say this is to suggest, among other things, that the mature Emerson held that deity is "a person" distinct and separate from man, the individual. But, except in his sermons from 1826 to 1831, there is little evidence for that. These revelatory voices for him were intuitive voices of his greater self, the

individual/Universal, voices that ultimately confirmed for him free will and self-reliance. In his double consciousness, he wrote, on the one hand, that "this self-reliance which belongs to every healthy human being, is proof . . . that not he, but the soul of the world, is in him; &, in proportion as it penetrates his miserable crust of particularity, saith, Here am I, here is the whole" (*JMN*, 14: 69; 1856). On the other hand, he said in "The Transcendentalist": "The height, the deity of man is to be self-sustained, to need no gift, no foreign force" (*CW*, 1:203-04).

- 14 Ellen Tucker Emerson, *The Life of Lidian Jackson Emerson*, ed. Delores Bird Carpenter (Boston: Twayne, 1980), 79. See David Robinson, *Apostle of Culture* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 123-37 for an important discussion about Emerson on God's "personality" in his "Divinity School Address"; and see Wesley T. Mott, *"The Strains of Eloquence": Emerson and His Sermons* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1989), chapter three, for a fine analysis of Emerson's progressive thought that culminated in his central doctrine of the "God within."
- 15 Eleanor M. Tilton, "Emerson's Lecture Schedule—1837-1838—Revised," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 20 (October 1973): 390.
- 16 *Freedom and Fate*, 20-21, 23. Andrews Norton, Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature at Harvard Divinity School and former teacher of Emerson, attacked Emerson for his insistence upon absolute intuitive certainty in religious matters. Norton wrote, in his famous "A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity" (1839): "To the demand for certainty, let it come from whom it may, I answer, that I know of no absolute certainty, beyond the limit of momentary consciousness, a certainty that vanishes the instant it exists, and is lost in the region of metaphysical doubt. . . . There can be no intuition, no direct perception, . . . no metaphysical certainty. . . . There is, then, no mode of establishing religious belief, but by the exercise of reason, by investigation, by forming a probable judgment upon facts" (quoted in Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950], 211-12). Irreconcilable differences between Emerson and the orthodox Unitarians were about what reality is and how one knows reality.
- 17 W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (New York: Meridian, 1956), 29.
- 18 For a discussion of this point, see Chapter Five, "Divine Personality," in my book *Studies in Religion in Early American Literature* (New York: Univ. Press of America, 1983), 94-124.
- 19 *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols. (Centenary Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-1904), 8:41.
- 20 I know of no significant reference by Emerson to photography or to a machine of projection. But I have found the theater metaphor useful in teaching Emerson, for it gives clarity to his concepts which are often vague, apparently without system, and difficult for the contemporary Western mind to grasp.
- 21 It would not be quite right to say that, for Emerson, each individual views the picture of nature from a slightly different angle, since this implies one objective picture at which all individuals are looking. But his cosmos is more "subjective" and monadic than this in that there are as many pictures of nature as there are individuals: "There is properly no History, only Biography" (*CW*, 2:6).
- 22 *Letters*, 3:9.
- 23 Emerson's use of the term "degrade" in this passage is striking and curious. G. L. Warnock quotes Kant who said that Berkeley "degraded bodies to mere illusion"

(*Berkeley*, 91). Perhaps Kant's judgment had been brought to Emerson's attention, and Emerson used the term "degrade" not to "put down" others but to defy Kantians and others who thought that ranking persons as phenomena was absurd.

- 24 Alcott's genuine entertainment of such an idea as "Nature proceeding from himself" (*JMN*, 5:178) helps explain Emerson's puzzling admiration of him. After his brother Charles died in the spring of 1836, Emerson literally knew no one, except Alcott, who seriously shared with him the adventure of what some people might call far-out philosophic ideas. Alcott must have replaced Charles, at least in part, in Emerson's imaginative life.
- 25 *Letters*, 2:32.



Ariana Smith Walker at age eighteen, from a crayon by A. Morse.
Franklin Benjamin Sanborn in 1853.

Twelve Ungathered Poems by Franklin B. Sanborn (1831–1917)

Ronald A. Bosco

Franklin Benjamin Sanborn is remembered today as an advocate for Abolitionism and for John Brown and as one of the “secret six” planners of the unsuccessful raid on Harpers Ferry, as a promoter of education and prison reform, and, especially, as the prolific memorialist of Transcendentalism and the movement’s leading figures: Emerson, Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott. While there appears to be a positive consensus about his efforts in the first two instances, most scholars moderate praise for Sanborn’s massive historical and biographical treatments of Transcendentalism with criticism over his tendency to rewrite history and the primary texts of his subjects. With the exception of his persistent champion Kenneth Walter Cameron, most consider Sanborn’s revisionism a reflection of either his own taste (illustrated by his wholesale liberties with, for instance, Thoreau’s prose) or his exaggerated sense of himself as central to the movement’s success (suggested by his seeming to claim greater intimacy or acceptance with its leading figures than he in fact enjoyed). Until Sanborn’s life and career are subjected to thorough critical assessment, mixed praise will likely continue as the prevailing judgment on his place in New England literary history.¹

The present piece steps outside the usual discussion of Sanborn’s life to add twelve previously unpublished poems to his collected verse, the least noticed portion of his writing. All the poems that follow were deposited in the Houghton Library of Harvard University by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association during successive additions of family papers to the Houghton collection; they are published here with the permission of the Association and of the Houghton Library.² The manuscripts and acquisition records provide no clues as to how the poems came into Emerson family hands, although in the details that follow two possibilities emerge. Sanborn may have given the poems to Edith Emerson Forbes, Emerson’s youngest child and Sanborn’s subject in several known poems from the late 1850s and early 1860s. Sanborn taught Edith at a private school in

Concord in the 1850s, and he proposed marriage to her in 1861, which she, with her father's approval, rejected. It is also possible that Sanborn gave the poems to Emerson for critical evaluation (a familiar role for Emerson who also served as critic and editor for the poems of Alcott and Jones Very, for instance) or as contributions toward Emerson's anthology *Parnassus* (1874), a volume of poems and poetic excerpts on which Edith served as her father's editorial assistant.

Throughout his varied career as schoolmaster, social scientist, journalist, and literary editor and historian, Sanborn, like many of his major and minor associates, was also an ambitious poet. He wrote nearly five hundred known poems, which have been compiled in two volumes: the first by John Michael Moran, Jr. in 1964, the second by Cameron in 1981.³ While some of the sources for poems collected in these volumes include unpublished correspondence and Sanborn's papers at the American Antiquarian Society, Concord Free Public Library, and Clifton Waller Barrett Library at the University of Virginia, most of Sanborn's known poems were published in his time as broadsides and commemorative pamphlets and in the columns of *The Commonwealth*, *The Granite Monthly*, *The Liberator*, *The Harvard Magazine*, and other newspapers and periodicals. Neither editor provides a critical appraisal of the quality or range of Sanborn's poems; however, in his collection Moran arranges poems in categories that aptly indicate Sanborn's poetic preoccupations, while in one prefatory aside Cameron makes a startling remark that may invite future discussion on the quality of Sanborn's poetry.

Moran collects Sanborn's poems under seven topical headings. First and foremost are poems to and about Ariana ("Anna") Smith Walker, a frail young woman from his native New Hampshire whom Sanborn met in 1850, courted over the next four years while he was a student at Exeter and Harvard, married eight days before her death from consumption on 31 August 1854, and never forgot.⁴ Next are nature poems, poems addressed to Edith Emerson, and poems on Sanborn's cat, "Bridget Muffin." By far the largest category, "occasional verses" include memorial poems on Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, Henry Thoreau, and Theodore Parker, odes for ceremonial events such as the dedication of Concord's Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in 1857 and the Soldiers' Monument in 1867, poems on friends' and relatives' birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries, and poems relating to his college experience, including his rhymed minutes of the Hasty Pudding Club composed when he served as Secretary in 1854. The remaining two categories of poems encompass translations from the classics set to verse and dramatic poems or, as Sanborn called them, "modern masques."

Sanborn wrote the twelve poems gathered here during the 1850s. Because the manuscripts of most are reasonably fair copies, he undoubtedly rewrote the poems in their present state sometime after composing them, which may also call into question his dating of some of them. Of the twelve poems, three—"Absence" and "On a Friend's Birthday" (both composed in 1851) and "The

Flowers" (1853)—were written for Ariana and are representative of the category. "Absence" is the first of two poems Sanborn composed under the same title. While the poem here describes his intense passion for his newfound love and sorrow at their separation while he is away at Exeter, in the later "Absence," composed shortly after Ariana's death, Sanborn is equally passionate on the subject of his loss.⁵

In addition to Sanborn's 1851 "Absence" and his two other poems explicitly for Ariana, four other poems gathered here invite association with her. While the untitled poem that opens "In the pastures happy girls" (1854) vaguely fits Moran's nature category, Ariana, whose disease was in remission early in 1854, actually may have served as its inspiration. Similarly, the three poems collected under the title "*Pictures*," all written either immediately before or during Sanborn's last year at Harvard (1854-1855), complete a cycle of four landscape poems that may well have its origin in Sanborn's sense of impending or realized loss of Ariana. Cameron prints "Cambridge Bridge," the first poem of the cycle, from a leaf in the Barrett collection which also contains "*Elegy*," one of Sanborn's many poems on Ariana's death. Like the three "*Pictures*" printed here, and especially "*II. The Deserted House*" with its images of "dusty woe" and "chilly gloom," "Cambridge Bridge" creates a sense of passing that may, as Cameron implies, refer only to the close of Sanborn's Harvard years, but may just as easily refer to his fear of life without Ariana:

I. Cambridge Bridge

When rosy twilight filled the west
Upon the bridge I stood,—
Behind me lay the hills at rest
Below me gleamed the flood.

Up from the sea beyond the town
Rose the full moon, and far
Down the steep sky and farther down
Slid the sweet evening star.

The waters plashed against the piers
And faintly lashed the shore,—
A sound as if of dropping tears
Rose sadly ever more.

Yet in the light the small waves leapt
And seemed alive with glee,—
The city bathed in silver slept,
And silver shone the sea.⁶

"February" (1856) is the sole poem gathered here that clearly fits the nature category. The remainder of the poems are all occasional verses. Sanborn composed "Ode" (1853?) and "Ulysses and We" (1853) as celebrations of his time at Harvard. As his introduction and note to the poem indicate, he wrote "Ulysses and We" when he became second editor of the magazine of the Institute of 1770, a literary, social, and debating club at Harvard; "Ode," evidently written to commemorate the graduation of persons his senior, may also have been written for members of the Institute of 1770 or, perhaps, for graduating members of the Hasty Pudding Club.⁷ "Birthday Poem" (1853) was written for Louisa Augusta Leavitt, Sanborn's cousin; while the poem ends with celebratory verses on Ariana, "the future Mrs. Sanborn / On my arm," in an ironic biographical twist, after he was refused by Edith Emerson, Sanborn married Louisa in 1862. Finally, although the subject of "Birthday Verses" (1856) is unidentified, images of the subject's passage into young womanhood and the poet's desire that she not "tremble at the loving voice that calls" strongly suggest Sanborn felt more than fondness for this person. Since only Ariana and Edith elicited such feeling in him (there are no comparable verses for Louisa), and since, to judge from the date Sanborn gave the poem, Ariana had been dead for two years, Sanborn probably wrote the poem for Edith. However, because Edith had turned only 15 in 1856, I suspect the poem is later than Sanborn's date suggests—probably 1859 or 1860. Possibly Sanborn merely erred in copying the date, but more likely he intentionally misdated the poem to obscure its subject for propriety's sake.

In his Preface to *Ungathered Poems and Transcendental Papers*, Cameron states that Sanborn's poems will "delight many and surprise a few." Among the surprises Cameron himself has to offer is the claim that in poems such as this, which is untitled and undated, Sanborn anticipates Emily Dickinson:

There are such shadows in the soul,—
Such busy serpents, swift and smooth,
Such pangs that Time can never soothe
Such weary lagging toward the goal.

Such dreaded words from loving lips,
Such dreary sinking of the heart,
Such clouds that day and sunshine part,
And baffling all, Death's sad collapse.

Oh never trust the painted wings
Of lying Hope! She does but bear
The soul an hour's relief from care,
To pay it with a life of stings.

Flit, swallows, through the gleaming sky!
 Fly loving birds, from tree to tree!
 For you Earth blooms — she blooms for me
 As flowers in mourning churchyards lie.⁸

While in the opening stanza of this poem and in succeeding images of the heart's "dreary sinking," "Death's sad collapse," "a life of stings," and "mourning churchyards" one easily senses a Dickinsonian aesthetic at work, such moments are, to this reader at least, rare across Sanborn's collected verse. Nevertheless, lending a certain authority to Cameron's claim is the confidence that Emerson had in Sanborn's poetic gift. He included Sanborn's "Anathemata" (two sonnets written to Edith in the early 1860s which Emerson titles and prints as one poem), "River Song," and "Ode Written for the Consecration of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery" in *Parnassus*. There, along with pieces by Ellery Channing, Frederic Henry Hedge, Helen Hunt, Lucy Larcom, Caroline Sturgis Tappan, and Byron Forceythe Willson, Sanborn's poems were introduced by Emerson as coming from new hands that "have yet to earn their laurels."⁹ Yet, suggestive as Cameron's claim is, a judgment on its validity, as well as on Emerson's confidence in Sanborn's poetry, awaits the critical scrutiny to which all of Sanborn's career must be subjected, including the extent to which he realized his ambition to be a serious poet.

The twelve poems that follow are printed in clear text that has been drawn from manuscript copy-text. Notes to the poems describe manuscript sources and, using standard editorial symbols, show all authorial insertions and deletions as they occur in the originals; notes also indicate any editorial emendation of the text. Lacking in the originals, page numbers have been editorially supplied in notes.

* * * * *

*Absence.*¹⁰

Ah! thou art in the best!
 Beyond the changing splendor of the sky,
 Beyond the mountains high
 My dove has found a nest.
 The sun shines later for thee than for me,
 And for the sounding sea
 Thou hast the rushing of the mountain winds,
 The merry dashing of the mountain streams;
 Another forest line thy vision binds,
 But the same sky above thee spreads and gleams.

Be this the symbol of my boundless love,
Whate'er thy life may be, lo, this is mine,
To overarch thee with a boundless love,
As the sweet skies stretch out their wings above
The season-changing land, the tossing brine.

Now must the cricket's cheer,
Sing loud but never near,
Ringing across brown fields with mellow tone,
Drive from my haunted ear
This lingering moan,
"Alone — alone!"
For thy dear monotone,
Thou black-stoled hedge priest, chanting hymns in choir,
Brings back the memory of those days of fire,
Tempered by misty skies, and the pure light
That made a Sabbath of the ambrosial night,
And let down Heaven in a silver chain,
I thank thee cricket, for thy homely strain.

Yes — thou art far away,—
And many a hill, made all of amethyst,
When the descending day God kist
Its glowing summit with his latest ray,
And many a pinewood's dusky green,
And many a maple's crimson sheen,
And many an oak's heroic breast,
And many an elm tree with its swinging nest,
Wall up the way

My eyes would take to thee;—
And gliding downward to the mother sea,
Beneath a bail of misty white
With ghostly glimmer in the still moonlight,
Full many a devious river flows between.

Yet one bold messenger that never heeds
Mountains or fordless floods
Or gloomy depth of woods,
Down from thy hills on swiftest pinion speeds.
The dancing western wind,
Bowling the oak that roars behind,

And shaking out the maple's scarlet banner,
Comes on in merry manner.

 "Aha!" cries he,
If thou could'st be like me
 A wanderer fast and free!
I know thee well, poor lover,
Full well I know the maid,—
She sat beside her window,
And a moment there I staid,—
 Could I help it? and I played
Amid her glossy hair,
And I kissed, and I kissed her forehead so fair,—
 And her little mouth I kist,—
 Ah, little she wist
I should bear that kiss to thee!
Turn thy face and receive it,
On thy lips here I give it,
"Is it sweet? I am gone," cries he.

Fare thee well, sweet carrier!
For this I love thee more
Than any wind whose wings may stir
The flaunting trees, as wildly whirr
Along the naked shore.
Now may there be no barrier
 'Twixt me and her.

1851

*On a Friend's Birthday.*¹¹

Dear Friend! to thee, whose long prized worth,
Grows with each passing day more bright,
Now while the loving arms of Night
Are folded round the sleeping earth,
(Night of the day that gave thee birth,)
My thoughts return with calm delight.

When woods were green and gay with song,
And roses hung in drooping bloom,
And breezes faint with rich perfume

O'er blossomed clover stole along,
Through all the day so bright and long,
And thro' the shortened hours of gloom;

In such fair season wert thou born;
And something of the season's grace
Grew early in thy thoughtful face,
And deep into thy spirit worn;
Its tranquil Eve, its glowing morn,
Its still serenity of days.

And from thy life an influence flows,
Apart from look and deed and word,—
The unmarked singing of a bird,
The ear heeds not such dulcet close,
Yet bringing peace where'er it goes.
It glides into the soul unheard.

Turn not away displeased, nor deem
My words are feigned or foolish praise;
For ah! my tongue but weakly says
Half that I feel and think and dream.
My soul is like a waveless stream,
Frail mirror, that a motion frays!

And what of good or pure or fair
The tempest from its surface drives,
Beneath the billows still survives,
Again in stillness mirrored there.
Weak virtue! that so ill can bear,
And ever cold and lonely lives.

With ancient faith renewed again
Shall we not pledge in trust sincere
A friendship that each mutual tear,
And shared delight and lightened pain
Shall bind in ever stronger chain
From slow succeeding year to year?

*Ode*¹²

Let gentlest winds of summer breathe
 With all their odors sweet
 And shake the green festoons that wreath
 The hall in which we meet;

Gay wreaths whose beauty well bespeaks
 The lovely hands that wrought,
 And flowers no brighter than the cheeks
 And lips of those that brought.

With all the grace that decks the year
 Would we our rites adorn,
 And let the rose of meeting here
 Conceal the parting thorn.

For as the never waiting tide
 Uncasps the friendly hands
 Outstretching o'er the vessel's side
 That sails to other lands,

So us the Sea of Time divides,
 And parts us each from each,
 While still the impatient vessel glides
 Far from the glittering beach,

But e'er the straining sails are set,
 Or yet the anchor weighed,
 Here on the pleasant shore we've met,
 Here must Farewell be said.

"Farewell, O brothers that depart,"
 We that remain will say:
 "Keep green the memory, warm the heart,
 However far away!"

"And Fare ye well that stay behind,"
 We that depart will say;
 "Fond memories haunt the generous heart,
 However far away."

Then keep the chain forever bright,
That links us each to all;
Our branch shall gleam with golden light
Though stately forests fall.

Beneath its shade we'll hope to meet,
When other suns shall shine.
And sing our song and ne'er forget
The days of "Auld Lang Syne."

1853?

Birthday Poem

Is it possible, Miss Leavitt,
Twenty years have slipped away,
Since the sun of hot midsummer
Shone upon your first birthday?

I remember, though it scarcely
Seems like twice twelve months ago,
When you wore a long sleeved tyer,
And were learning how to sew.

In those days you read sweet stories
Out of highly colored books,
Of fair queens and shepherdesses
With their coronets and crooks.

On her throne the lovely princess
Sat and reigned as princess should,
While the shepherd maiden guided
Sheep to pasture through the wood.

Little did you think, I fancy,
That your twentieth year would find
In your own most proper person
Queen and shepherdess combined.

On your throne, (except vacations.)
All the day your state you keep,
While you yet with care and shouting
Tend and drive your Irish sheep.

Well, I think no shepherd maiden
Found more pleasure in her flock,
Though in green Arcadian meadows
She sat piping on a rock.

And the princesses, God save them!
With their pretty crowns and pearls,
Get as little joy of living
As a washerwoman's girls.

So upon the whole, dear cousin,
You are happy, I believe,
And may every future birthday
Bring as little cause to grieve.

When you wear a cap and glasses,
And sit knitting by the door,
While your children's noisy children
Tumble round upon the floor;

With the future Mrs. Sanborn
On my arm, with careful feet,
On some pleasant July morning
You will see me in the street,

Coming up to greet your birthday
With a wish as kind and true
As today I write these verses
Dearest cousin, unto you.

Friday, July 15, 1853

Ulysses and We.¹³

Written for the Institute of 1770 at the close of my Sophomore year.

Fate, who will always have her way, like a true woman, has decreed that your third editor shall not appear before you again in his official capacity. But we cannot resist the inclination which we feel, to come forward a little out of our

place, to say a parting word to our brothers of the Institute. We should do injustice to our feelings, did we not publicly express the deep sense of obligation which the cordial support of the Society has given us. We have endeavored to fulfil the duties of the place to which your favor and not our merit has called us, and we have every reason to thank the Society for its friendly reception of what we have presented. And it gives us a touch of sadness to reflect that we shall no more be the medium through which sharp critiques, side splitting chronicles and presidential poetry are to be offered for your consideration.

Not to detain you longer, we will close with certain *versiculi*, inspired by Prof. Gray's coffee, for the excellence of which, and for all the pleasures of a delightful evening, may he live forever, and never become a widower.

When, tost by all the blasts of every wind,

Ulysses wandered o'er

The unpropitious sea, forbid to find

The sheltering harbors of his rocky shore.

Fate threw him on a green and flowery isle.

Fair navelled in the waves

That for his perished comrades mourned the while,

And lashed the surge above their wandering graves.

There sat the birds and sung the summer day,

From the first dawning flame,

Till dropped the crimson sun, and evening gray,

Quenching the western lustre softly came.

But fairer than gray evening planet-crowned,

Brighter than day's glad sheen,

And richer voiced than bird of sweetest sound,

Calypso dwelt therein, the island's queen.

Pleased with the welcome of the nymph divine

Ulysses lingered here,

While the gay months their ceaseless chorus time

And bring too swiftly the revolving year.

Then must he launch upon the sea again,

And face the seaman's toil,

Forsake the weeping goddess, and in vain

Cast backward glances toward the friendly soil.

So like the tired Ulysses did we find
 Calypso's island here;
 And here have ever met a welcome kind,
 Throughout the circle of the closing year.

And sadly shall we go to dwell no more
 Within the pleasant isle:
 Ah, as our bark glides farther from the shore,
 The lessening woods behind still brighter smile.

And the Calypso that we sigh to leave,
 As from the land we part
 Throws a gold net of memories that weave
 Round the warm pulses of the grateful heart.

July 1853

[Untitled]¹⁴

In the pastures happy girls,
 Catching sunlight in their curls,
 Ramble forth by two's and three's,
 Kissed by many a soaring breeze,
 Searching all the meadows through
 For the violet's modest blue,
 Slender, pale anemones
 Blooming 'mid the scattered trees
 And the Mayflowers where they hide
 On the forest's sunny side.

1854

The Flowers

Well might my heart in lovely flowers
 Its tender story tell,
 Brought daily to thee from the dewy dell
 Or open meadow, or fresh garden bowers.

Not only these, the scentless growth
 Of some wood-shaded rill,

But such as in the early summer fill
With fragrance the soft breezes of the earth.

Or in the merry month of May,
The violet's drooping face
Upon thy gentle bosom should'st thou place,
And wear it for its sweetness all the day.

With roses would I crown thy hair,
And in thy little hand
Put whitest lilies that do grow on land,
And dripping lotus blossoms, wet and fair.

Yet all that blooms in wood or field,
From Spring till Spring again,
Are but faint pictures imaging in vain
The beauty that Love's happy moments yield.

1853

*Pictures*¹⁵

II. The Deserted House

"The shadows of the four great elms"
said he,
"Drop on the roof and walls,—
The gay gold robin flies from tree to tree
And sings and-calls.

"The twittering swallows build their mason work
Beneath the barn's long eaves.
About the beehives still the king birds lurk
And clang amid the leaves.

"The bees still hum about the mossy hives
The unused well beside,—
Within the garden still the rose-tree thrives
And blooms in summer pride.

"But ah, the house — within the house"
said he

“’Tis ever dark and still,—
No sound of household work — of childish glee
Is echoed from the hill.

“The tall old clock that in its corner stood
A hundred years ago,
Nor ceased its beat through evil and through good,
Is dumb in dusty woe.

“The mirrors hang as ever on the wall
In each resounding room,
And catch the straying sunbeams as they fall
Across the chilly gloom.”

1854

*Pictures*¹⁶

III. The April Sunset.

The day flowed on — the haughty sun
Whose course so brilliantly begun,
Grown weary with his long ascent,
His golden quiver almost spent
Heard the dark footsteps of the night
And glided down the western height.

But ’ere he wholly passed from view
About his fading form he drew
His cloudy mantle woven wide
And crimson fringed on either side
As if he sought his face to hide,—
And as the fleeing Parthian’s bow
Shot sudden arrows at his foe,
So he, pursued, behind him cast
His level arrows and his last
Above him, hurrying to his hold,
The land-exulting pëon of the thunder rolled.

1854

IV. *The Afternoon*

Where the pine tree's waving hair,
 Swaying in the purple air.
 Mingles in its murmurs sweet
 With the brook's noise at its feet.
 On a mossy pillow laid
 Half in sunshine, half in shade.
 Will I notice what I may
 In this glowing April day.

On my ears as here I lie
 Breaks the farmer's cheerful cry,—
 O'er the hillside, moving slow
 Pace the oxen to and fro.
 Drawing through the greensword fair
 Step by step the shriving share,
 Side by side in waving lines
 Furrow after furrow shines.
 Waiting for the seed to fall
 And the summer sun to call.
 And the wind of June to blow
 'Ere the ample harvest grow.

1854?

*February*¹⁷

With lovely flush the winter sunset fills
 The sky that dips between the western hills,
 And higher up the pure young moon afloat,
 Through rose and purple steers her silver boat,—
 And still and sacred as Love's dawning light,
 Stars bloom along the meadows of the night.

Oh wondrous Beauty! how thou put'st to shame
 This trivial life of ours with thy clear flame.
 How poor we look when Nature's torches shine!
 Is aught in us to match this grace divine?
 Yes, Love fresh kindled at the eternal sun,
 And glowing in two hearts that beat as one.

1856

Birthday Verses.

As one who journeys through a land unknown,
Turns often on some hilltops whence to see
How much before him lies — how far he's gone.
So is it on this day, dear Friend with thee.

Thou from the East upon thy way did'st start,
In morning freshness, under childhood's sky,—
But now thou journeyest with a woman's heart,
And over thee Life's sun has risen high.

Fades from the East the morning's rosy splendor,
And yields to day's uncolored, steady light,—
Nor yet can'st thou behold the lines so tender,
That in the West foretell the coming night.

"Oh night most welcome if a welcome day,
Gladly I pass within thy starry walls!"
So when the twilight deepens mayst thou say,—
Nor tremble at the loving voice that calls.

1856

Notes

- 1 All significant treatments of Transcendentalism include comment on Sanborn. For a survey of scholarship, including Cameron's many compilations of Sanborn's writings, see Robert E. Burkholder, "Franklin Benjamin Sanborn," in *The Transcendentalists: A Review of Research and Criticism*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Modern Language Association, 1984), 253-59; Burkholder's entry in *Biographical Dictionary of Transcendentalism*, ed. Wesley T. Mott (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 229-31, provides a recent biographical overview. Benjamin Blakely Hickock's "The Political and Literary Careers of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn" (Ph.D. Diss., Michigan State University, 1953) is the only complete biography. Sanborn's three books on Thoreau, *Henry D. Thoreau* (1882), *The Personality of Thoreau* (1901), and *The Life of Henry D. Thoreau* (1917), along with his *A. Bronson Alcott: His Life and Philosophy* (1893; written with W. T. Harris), *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1901), and *The Personality of Emerson* (1903), show ample evidence of his inaccurate transcription of his subjects' texts and exaggerated sense of his centrality to Transcendentalism. Emerson fully understood Sanborn's liabilities: In 1872 Emerson expressed "dread" to his daughter Ellen that Sanborn should ever have access to his papers after his death,

- and on his deathbed in 1882, he issued Sanborn a significant rebuff by having him dismissed from the room; see *The Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson*, ed. Edith E. W. Gregg, 2 vols. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1982), 1:690, 2:676.
- 2 In the Houghton Library, see bMS Am 1280.235 (522).
- 3 *Collected Poems of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn of Transcendental Concord*, ed. John Michael Moran, Jr. (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1964); *Ungathered Poems and Transcendental Papers by Franklin Benjamin Sanborn*, ed. Kenneth Walter Cameron (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1981).
- 4 For details, see Hickock, "The Political and Literary Careers of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn," 31-66. Hickock reports that fifty-one years after Ariana's death, Sanborn continued to write about her and recopy passages from her letters and journals in his papers (65).
- 5 For the later "Absence," see *Ungathered Poems and Transcendental Papers*, 212. Sanborn dates the second poem 1853, yet Cameron's guess that the poem was likely written after Ariana's death in 1854 seems more than justified on the basis of internal evidence alone. I suspect that Sanborn titled the poem "Absence" with the intention to have it serve as a post-Ariana companion to the earlier poem printed below.
- 6 *Ungathered Poems and Transcendental Papers*, 211.
- 7 According to records of the Institute of 1770 in the Harvard University Archives, Sanborn was proposed for membership on 10 September and 8 October 1852; he was finally elected to membership and as second editor of the club's literary magazine on 4 March 1853. The club's minutes for 8 July 1853 note in reference to "Ulysses and We," "Mr. Sanborn read a voluntary valedictory." No comparable evidence for "Ode" has been found in the records of the Institute of 1770 or the Hasty Pudding Club.
- 8 *Ungathered Poems and Transcendental Papers*, [i], 255.
- 9 *Parnassus*, ed. Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1874), x. Sanborn's poems appear on 59, 442, and 462, respectively.
- 10 MS: two sheets of unlined white paper folded to make four pages each; pages, unnumbered, measure 20.2 x 12.4 cm.; pages 2, 4, and 6 are blank. Line 15: season-changing] season changing 23: black-stoled . . . choir,] black stoled . . . choir<:>. 24: those days] those <skies> days 27: a silver] a <si> silver 41: still] <ai>still 60: kissed, and I kissed] kissed, and I kissed 66: "Is it] Is it 73: 'Twixt] Twixt
- 11 MS: one sheet of unlined white paper folded to make four pages; pages, unnumbered, measure 20.2 x 12.4 cm.; page 2 is blank. Line 22: dulcet] dulc<i>et 41: bind] <link> bind
- 12 MS: one sheet of unlined white paper folded to make four pages; pages, unnumbered, measure 18.9 x 11.5 cm.: "Ode," undated, occurs on pages 1-2, "Birthday Poem" on pages 3-4.
 "Ode": line 27: "Keep] Keep
 "Birthday Poem": lines 41-42: Mrs. Sanborn / On] Mrs Sanborn <on> / On
- 13 MS: one sheet of unlined white paper folded to make four pages; pages, unnumbered, measure 25.1 x 19.2 cm.; introductory remarks occur on page 1, "Ulysses and We" on pages 2-3; page 4 is blank.
 Written . . . Sophomore year.] Sanborn's note below date
 Introductory remarks: more be the medium . . . critiques, side . . . presidential poetry are to be offered] more be the <organ> medium . . . critiques, <m>side . . .

presidential poetry <is>are to be <presented> offered

"Ulysses and We.": line 1: tost by all the blasts of] tost by <every wave and> all the blasts of 10: first dawning] first <eastern> dawning 19: chorus time] chorus <home>time 20: revolving] r<a>evolving 28: circle of the] circle of <ot>the

- 14 MS: one sheet of unlined white paper folded to make four pages; pages, unnumbered, measure 20.2 x 12.5 cm.; untitled poem occurs on page 1, "*The Flowers —*," which follows, on pages 1 and 3; pages 2 and 4 are blank.

[Untitled]: line 3: two's and three's] twos and threes 6: violet's] violets 8: 'mid] mid

"*The Flowers —*": line 4: Or open meadow, or fresh] <And> Or open meadow, <of>or fresh 6: wood-shaded] woodshaded 11: should'st] shouldst

- 15 MS: one sheet of unlined white paper folded to make four pages; pages, unnumbered, measure 20.2 x 12.5 cm.; the poem occurs on pages 1 and 3; pages 2 and 4 are blank. Line 2: "Drop] Drop 14: "'Tis] "Tis

- 16 MS: one sheet of unlined white paper folded to make four pages; pages, unnumbered, measure 20.3 x 12.5 cm.; "*III. The April Sunset*" occurs on page 1, "*IV. The Afternoon*," which follows and is undated, on page 3; pages 2 and 4 are blank.

"*Pictures*" underlined twice

"*III. The April Sunset*": line 7: 'ere] ere 17: land-exulting] landexulting

"*IV. The Afternoon*": line 20: 'Ere] Ere

- 17 MS: one sheet of unlined white paper folded to make four pages; pages, unnumbered, measure 20.3 x 12.5 cm.; "*February*" occurs on page 1, "*Birthday Verses*," which follows, on pages 3-4; page 2 is blank.

"*Birthday Verses*": line 11: can'st] canst



The Charles S. Sargent house at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, circa 1875.
This westward prospect shows Little Harbor and the Elizabeth Islands.
Courtesy of Woods Hole Historical Collection

John Muir and Thoreau's Cape Cod

J. Parker Huber

John Muir's prodigious travels included five trips to New England. In 1898 he made a short visit to Cape Cod. His real appreciation of this sandy peninsula where the Pilgrims first landed in 1620, however, came not from this brief encounter, but from his two close readings of Thoreau's *Cape Cod*, neither of which I can date. That he read *Cape Cod* before coming to the place itself is plausible but as yet unsubstantiated. Since he does not refer to the book while on his trip, probably he did not carry it with him. Nor does he mention it in his correspondence of this year, though seldom are his many readings referred to this way. This essay examines Muir's readings of Thoreau's *Cape Cod* and then his own Cape Cod sojourn.

In 1849, the same year that John Muir came to America from Scotland and settled on Fountain Lake Farm in Wisconsin, Henry Thoreau made his first of five trips to Cape Cod. Thoreau's destination four times was the lower Cape, the Great Beach, that twenty-seven mile stretch of sand from Provincetown in the north to Orleans in the south, between the Atlantic Ocean and Cape Cod Bay, much of which is fortunately now our National Seashore. He reached this region from Concord in October 1849 via Boston by train to Sandwich and from there by stagecoach to Orleans; in June 1850 and again in July 1855 by steamer from Boston to Provincetown; and in June 1857 from Manomet on foot to Scusset and by cars to Sandwich and then on foot diagonally across the Cape to Friends Village, then northward to Orleans, Wellfleet, Highland Light, and Provincetown, from where he steamed to Boston. His winter excursion of December 1854 took him only to mid-Cape by train via New Bedford to Hyannis, and from there by ferry to Nantucket Island, where he lectured.¹ Thoreau never entered the village of Woods Hole, where John Muir would spend a part of two days in September 1898, his only visit to Cape Cod. Thoreau did observe Woods Hole from aboard the New Bedford steamer *Eagle's Wing* on 27 June 1856. That summer day Thoreau also saw all the Elizabeth Islands, and for two-and-a-half hours delighted in walking amid beech, oaks, and tupelo on the largest of these, Naushon.²

Thoreau presented his impressions of Cape Cod to the world. He gave several lectures in 1850 and 1851.³ Then, the summer 1855 issues of *Putnam's Monthly* carried what would become four chapters in his book. At last, ten years later and three years after Thoreau's death, *Cape Cod*, a book of ten chapters, was published by Ticknor and Fields of Boston; it has been in print ever since.⁴ Modern editions feature introductions by Henry Beston (1951), Robert Finch (1984), and Paul Theroux (1987).

Muir's immersion in *Cape Cod* was considerably more thorough than his exposure to Cape Cod itself. Here he received the essence of this place. First, he read volume four of the Riverside Edition of *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, published by Houghton Mifflin from 1896 to 1898.⁵ As usual, he marked passages in pencil in the margins: thirty-one vertical lines and one horizontal line. And, on a blank page at the back of the book, he created his own index: twenty-one items with twenty-five page references. His index is included as Appendix A.

Muir considered *Cape Cod* worthy of further reflection. In 1906 Houghton Mifflin published *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* in twenty volumes. Muir acquired this set in 1908.⁶ Volume four is titled *Cape Cod and Miscellanies*. This time his pencil was busier in the margins: sixty-six vertical lines and nine horizontal lines. As there are no marks in the first three chapters, he presumably ignored these. His markings begin with Thoreau's powerful metaphors in the first two paragraphs of chapter four, "The Beach." Muir's own index, appearing at the back and identifying twenty items on thirty pages (the last reference is multiple pages), is presented in Appendix B.

Let us now join Muir for his venture to Cape Cod.

Boston

Muir arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday, 17 September 1898, completing a ten-day transcontinental trip from his home in Martinez, California. He had taken the northern route. From San Francisco to Portland, Oregon, to Spokane, Washington. East from there over the Rocky Mountains via the Great Northern Railway. Across the Great Plains where one engine was replaced by another and another and another. From St. Paul, Minnesota, he caught a night train to Duluth in time for "the last steamer of the season" through the Great Lakes—Superior, Huron, Erie—in three nights to Buffalo, New York, where he boarded the 7:10 P.M. train for New England, emerging at daylight from the Hoosac Tunnel of northwestern Massachusetts, then south through Connecticut and Rhode Island to Providence, then north to Boston.⁷

New landscapes and people levitated him. His eyes absorbed natural wonders: "goldenrod all across the continent. great is goldenrod."⁸ This image

and others jotted ever so briefly in his journal and letters home, despite "the swaying jolting jumbling car."⁹ On route he may have worked more on his essays on the animals and birds of Yosemite for the *Atlantic Monthly*. He tried to rest. Mostly, he dished out delectable anecdotes: "I have picked up quite a lot of companions to whom I preach daily. some of them preachers."¹⁰ Until Buffalo, where he parted, "feeling very weak & sick" (JMJ, 16 September 1898). Dyspepsia was his diagnosis. "The horrible food and eternal jolting and carbonic acid upset my stomach."¹¹ Dining car menus of the era show the influence of the region transited. Typically, dinners of soup, fish or roast beef, lettuce salad; a choice of vegetables—potatoes (mashed or boiled), French peas, string beans, succotash; for dessert—ice cream, cake, or pie. All for one dollar.¹² At the Spaulding Hotel in Duluth, Muir had had a beefsteak breakfast.¹³ Aboard ship, boiled Lake Superior trout, corned beef and cabbage, pork and beans.¹⁴ And always, his elixir of life, tea.

From the Boston and Providence Railroad Depot on Park Square, Muir went directly to the Adams House at 553 Washington Street, four blocks east, presumably by livery. There he took a room for one dollar, bathed, changed clothes, and read a message from Charles Sprague Sargent, Director of the Arnold Arboretum.¹⁵ Sargent himself was soon knocking on Muir's door. Sargent had invited Muir and William M. Canby of Wilmington, Delaware, to see the southern Appalachian forests. The previous summer the trio had traveled to British Columbia and Alaska to witness western trees. The summer before that, in 1896, Sargent and Muir had surveyed forests from Lake Michigan to the Pacific Ocean for the National Forestry Commission, which Sargent headed. Sargent dedicated to Canby his just completed twelfth volume of *The Silva of North America* (1891-1902).¹⁶ He had bestowed the same honor on Muir for the previous volume, which appeared earlier in 1898. "[I]t made my heart jump with joy as no other honor I have received ever did," Muir responded.¹⁷ Sargent affirmed his gift in a letter: "For if there is any man who loves and knows trees, and knows how to write about them better than anybody else, you are the Fellow."¹⁸

Cape Cod

Within hours of his arrival, a weary Muir was moving again. Their destination, in Sargent's words: "a spot where you will find a great many things to interest you."¹⁹ Sargent, promising scenery and seclusion, had enticed Muir to "pass a few days on the end of Cape Cod where my family goes for a few weeks every summer."²⁰ Their means of transportation, though undisclosed, was assuredly train. Their route on Saturday, 17 September 1898, was from Boston south to New Bedford, then east to Buzzards Bay, crossing Monument River (now the Cape Cod Canal), and south along Cape Cod's west coast, a moraine of pitch pines and scrub oaks, cranberry bogs, and strawberries in sandy soil, small villages with

glimpses of water. A stretch of the last four miles from Falmouth ran between ocean with cormorants and eiders on one side and ponds with cattails and reeds, saltspray rose and bittersweet on the other. Muir noted it: "Fine woods all the way perhaps 90 ms. Many fine residences of rich people seeking summer coolness. Magnificent Asters & goldenrods[,] deep glacial bays. heavy drift[,] Extreme end of Cape sandy" (JMJ).

Two-and-a-half hours and seventy-two miles after departing Boston, they pulled into Woods Hole, whose depot is now replaced by a ferry terminal for the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Sargent's home was not far: a mile east past the north end of Little Harbor, then south three-quarters of a mile down Church Street, which passed over the railroad, now a bicycle path from Falmouth. The two men, laden with baggage, likely came by carriage, though Muir had accidentally lightened his load in New York: "Lost small grip by mistake of a gentleman who left his in exchange" (JMJ, 17 September 1898). From Church Street a long drive descended to the back of a gracious home that incorporated the oldest dwelling in the village, once an inn.²¹ On the south side, the main door opened into a reception area with dining room to the right and parlor to the left, both with shallow brick fireplaces. Beyond the dining room, a commodious kitchen and pantry; beyond the parlor, another entryway, this one with stairs to the second-floor bedrooms. They arrived in time for tea.

"Met Mrs. Sargent & the fine girls & manly boys just getting ready for Harvard," Muir commented in his journal (JMJ). Some twenty-five years earlier, on 26 November 1873, at Emmanuel Church in Boston, Charles Sargent, thirty-two, married Mary Allen Robeson, twenty, a woman of refinement, wealth, and, like Muir, Scottish ancestry. Asa Gray of Harvard, who the previous summer had been botanizing in Yosemite Valley with John Muir, attended their wedding. Surely he told them about Muir.²²

At the time of Muir's visit, the Sargents had five children, three daughters and two sons. The oldest, Henrietta, twenty-four, was not present. Though Sargent had not written Muir about her marriage to architect Guy Lowell on 17 May, he undoubtedly noted that event now to explain her absence. So Muir greeted Molly (Mary) and Alice, ages twenty and sixteen. On 25 January 1908 Molly would marry Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch Potter of Columbia University and thereafter reside in New York. Alice, staying single, would remain at home in Brookline. Andrew Robeson, twenty-two that December, and Charles, four years younger, would graduate Harvard in 1900 and 1902 (as their father had in 1862), pursuing careers in landscape architecture and finance, respectively.²³

After graduation, Andrew, or "Bobo" as he was called, worked in the Boston office of his brother-in-law, Guy Lowell. Muir came to know Andrew best of the children. Five years after Muir's visit to Cape Cod, Muir and Andrew and Sargent would travel around the world. From May to December 1903, from Boston to Shanghai, they explored gardens and forests, collecting a trove of seeds,

before going their separate ways. The two Sargents returned home, where Andrew reported to the press the “incalculable value” of their study.²⁴ Muir went on to India, Egypt, Australia, and New Zealand before coming back to California in May 1904. Andrew died of pneumonia in 1918 at age forty-two.²⁵ In his short life he designed superb gardens on Cape Cod, the North Shore, Islesboro (Maine), and Long Island.

On the day of Muir’s arrival at the Sargent family summer home, he closed his travel diary: “Still sick unable to eat the fine dinner prepared for me—a miserable trip” (JMJ). The rearrangement of his insides precluded any leisure feast enlivened by storytelling, any strolls along the shore, any engagement with the environment, spirited or otherwise. The next day, Sunday, 18 September 1898, he was still healing. His diary entry contains only twenty words. As there is nothing about Cape Cod, Muir must have stayed put. Presumably, he at least did not miss the view from Sargent’s of Little Harbor, of spritsails and ferries crossing Vineyard Sound, of Martha’s Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands—the closest being Nonamesset, two miles distant; and almost touching it, the largest in the chain, Naushon.

On one of those Elizabeth Islands, Penikese (which Muir could not see), a coeducational summer school of natural history was created in 1873 by Harvard professor Louis Agassiz, whose glacial theories informed Muir’s.²⁶ The August before this, 1872, Agassiz’s illness prevented his meeting John Muir in California and seeing the Sierra Nevada. In 1893, five years before his Cape Cod visit, Muir made a pilgrimage to Agassiz’s homeland, Switzerland. In Neuchâtel, at whose university Agassiz had been professor of natural history from 1832 until his coming to America in 1846, Muir observed: “another beautiful & quaint old town on the shore of a lovely lake more than 20 miles long.”²⁷ Here Agassiz, in a stone shelter dubbed “Hôtel des Neuchâtelois” on the great medial moraine of Aar glacier, had monitored the motion of the ice.

Two of the students attending Agassiz’s lectures that summer of 1873 on Penikese were David Starr Jordan, an 1872 graduate of Cornell University, and Susan Bowen, a teacher at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. They returned the next year. Even though Agassiz had died in December of 1873, his only son, Alexander, managed the school for its second season, after which it closed forever. Jordan and Bowen were married on 10 March 1875. They lived in Indiana, where he taught at what is now Butler University until becoming president of Indiana University in January 1885. In December of that year, Bowen died.²⁸ When David Starr Jordan came to California in 1891 as president of the new Leland Stanford University, he knew about Muir both from Muir’s essay on water ouzels and from their mutual friend, Catharine Merrill in Indiana.²⁹ In California, they became friends and collaborated in behalf of forest conservation.³⁰ In a 1903 letter to Muir, Jordan expressed regret over not visiting Muir at Martinez: “One trouble is that we have such absolute confidence in your sound-

ness and sweetness that we do not need to watch you all the time as we might some poet of whose personality we were less sure.”³¹

Boston Again

On that Sunday of 1898 Muir and Sargent returned to Boston by late afternoon train, while the Sargent family stayed in Woods Hole. The boys did not have to be at Harvard until later in September; the girls were not in school. Molly Sargent would soon be bound for Europe to join her older sister, Henrietta, in Paris. On 26 October Sargent and Muir would escort her to New York. They would stay at the Albermarle Hotel at Madison Square West, “a small but expensive [two dollars a night!] & convenient house” where they would enjoy a “[f]ine champagne supper” including Molly’s suitor, a Mr. Jay, with whom they would have some fun the next day: “Sargent teases him by inviting me to ship to see Molly off taking his [Mr. Jay’s] place in carriage. Amusing half earnest talk with Jay advising him to run away & leave all—ropes would not hold me I said” (JMJ).

Meanwhile, back in Boston from Cape Cod on 18 September, Muir had a “fine drive in Sargent’s cab thru park to Brookline” (JMJ). Their route—four miles westward—to Holm Lea, Sargent’s home, probably followed the Back Bay Fens and Muddy River greenway created by Frederick Law Olmsted. Since 1883 Olmsted had lived at 99 Warren Street, across the street from Sargent. Though Muir and Olmsted had much in common, and it would have been convenient for them to meet here, they did not do so. Failing memory had forced Olmsted’s retirement in 1895 at age seventy-three. For some time he had been secluded on Deer Island, Maine, until this very month of September 1898 when his wife, Mary, committed him to McLean Asylum in Waverly (Belmont), Massachusetts, where he would die on 28 August 1903.³² Muir wrote of his arrival at Sargent’s home, “Eat toast & to bed” (JMJ).

The next day, Monday, 19 September, Muir recuperated at Sargent’s—“sleeping sauntering reading still sick” (JMJ). Their only visitor was Walter H. Page, whom they telegraphed to come for lunch. Page, forty-three, had just assumed the editorship of the *Atlantic Monthly* in August. Three years ago he had come to the magazine as assistant to the editor, Horace E. Scudder. Serendipity brought Page and Sargent together in February 1897. The editor wanted forest articles; the arborophile knew the perfect person. They both wrote John Muir asking for his words.³³ Muir granted their wish, though not immediately. First, he had a commitment to *Harper’s Weekly* for “The National Parks and Forest Reservations,” which appeared in June. August’s *Atlantic Monthly*, however, carried Muir’s “The American Forests” to the great joy of his solicitors.³⁴ From then on, Muir was welcome at that prestigious magazine. “Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West” followed there in January 1898 and “Yellowstone National Park” in April.

Page liked Muir's "bird and beast articles" and published them in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November and December.³⁵ The next year, 1899, Page published another Muir park piece; then two more the next year, and the next. Eventually, these ten essays became *Our National Parks*, published by Houghton Mifflin and Company of Boston in 1901. "To you and Sargent," Muir thanked Page, "it owes its existence; for before I got your urgent and encouraging letters I never dreamed of writing such a book."³⁶ On 25 October 1898 Muir would be at Page's home, 9 Riedesel Avenue, Cambridge. That afternoon Muir and Page's wife, Willia Alice Wilson, "Allie", would call on Jane Loring Gray at 79 Garden Street, a few blocks away. She had been married to Asa Gray for almost forty years when he died in 1888. Apparently, Muir would spend that night with the Pages.³⁷ Seven years later, in the spring of 1905, the Pages would be guests of the Muirs in Martinez, California.³⁸

During the two-hour conversation at Sargent's house the day after their return from Cape Cod, Muir and his host probably outlined their upcoming southern journey for Page, who was a native of North Carolina. Muir summed up their meeting: "had good chat. Smart fellow" (MJJ).

At 10:00 A.M. the next day, Tuesday, 20 September 1898, Muir and Sargent headed south by train for two days. It was not until the twenty-fourth, when walking among the rhododendrons atop Roan Mountain on the Tennessee-North Carolina border, that Muir felt well for the first time since leaving home more than two weeks before.³⁹

* * * * *

Appendix A

John Muir's Index to Thoreau's *Cape Cod* (Houghton Mifflin, 1897)

Explanation: Line one contains Muir's holograph (*italics added*) with the heading and page number(s). The corresponding chapter and page(s) in the Princeton edition of *Cape Cod* are cited in brackets. Below that, the passage to which Muir refers is described and/or quoted. Finally, if Muir also marked in the margin of the page, the nature of his mark (vertical or horizontal) and the number of text lines it covers are indicated in *italics within brackets*.

"Immortality 12"

["The Shipwreck," 10]

Thoreau remarks of the dead: "[T]hey were within a mile of its shores; but, before they could reach it, they emigrated to a newer world than ever Columbus dreamed of, yet one of whose existence we believe that there is far more universal and convincing evidence." [*Muir vertical line, three lines*]

“*Datura 16*”

[“The Shipwreck.” 12]

This plant, called Jimsonweed or Thorn Apple (*Datura stramonium*), Thoreau found on the beach in Hull, Massachusetts, 25 June 1851. From Asia, Thoreau says, it was “carried in ballast all over the world.” It was also called Jamestown weed in Robert Beverley, *The History of Virginia* (1722), from which Thoreau draws an anecdote of its strange effects on soldiers who ate it. [*Muir vertical line, two lines*]

“*minds fresh 22*”

[“Stage-Coach Views.” 16]

Thoreau asserts that stereotypical postcard villages like Sandwich are not beautiful “to him who, with unprejudiced senses, has just come out of the woods.” [*Muir horizontal line, one line*]

“*Thoreau 26 85 111 244*”

[“Stage-Coach Views.” 19]

“But we respect them [toothless women] not the less for all that; our own dental system is far from perfect.” [*Muir vertical line, between lines*] [Note: “If I have got false teeth,” Thoreau reported in his *Journal* on 12 May 1851, “I trust that I have not got a false conscience.” Muir did not comment on this passage in his copy of the 1906 edition of Thoreau’s *Journal* (II, 194). (See *Princeton Journal 3: 1848–1851*, 218.)]

[“The Beach.” 57]

Thoreau cooks a clam for dinner. [*Muir vertical line, more than two lines*]

[“The Wellfleet Oysterman,” 73–74]

Thoreau tells his host that he is sick from the clam he ate.

[“The Sea and the Desert.” 160]

A resident shows him “the best locality for strawberries,” expecting Thoreau, a stranger, not to return. “I therefore feel bound in honor not to reveal it.” [*Muir vertical line, more than three lines*]

“*Apple Trees 37*”

[“The Plains of Nauset,” 25–26]

Thoreau describes wind-shaped configurations of apple trees in hollows, quoting

their owner, "'I got *him* out of the woods, but *he* doesn't bear.'" [*Muir vertical line, one line*]

"Hunting 43"

[*"The Plains of Nauset," 29*]

A 1695 Eastham ordinance, passed to protect cornfields, required that for a man to marry he had to kill six blackbirds or three crows. [*Muir vertical line, five lines*]

"Schools 53"

[*"The Plains of Nauset," 35-36*]

"Also, a duty was put on mackerel here to support a free-school; in other words, the mackerel-school was taxed, in order that the children's school might be free." [*Muir vertical line on page 52, more than two lines*]

"Waves & falls 66"

[*"The Beach," 44-45*]

"The waves broke on the bars at some distance from the shore . . . like a thousand waterfalls." "The breakers looked like droves of a thousand wild horses of Neptune." [*Muir vertical line, more than two lines*]

"Gulls 83"

[*"The Beach," 55*]

Thoreau relates a method of catching gulls used in Wellfleet in 1794, whereby gulls are drawn to a whale-flesh-covered house from which a man reaches out and catches them. [*Muir vertical lines in three places, more than six lines total*]

"Religion 117"

[*"The Wellfleet Oysterman," 78*]

"He was curious to know to what religious sect we belonged." [*Muir vertical line, three lines*]

"Spoils of Sea 137"

[*"The Beach Again," 90-92*]

Thoreau muses about curiosities fish have swallowed. [*Muir vertical line, two lines*] A certificate of membership in the Methodist Church was found in one. [*Muir vertical line, four lines on page 138*] Thoreau finds cord and buoy, which

he takes home and uses for a garden line. [*Muir vertical line, more than two lines on page 138*] Of a half-full bottle of red ale in the sand, he comments, "all that remained I fancied from the wreck of a rowdy world." [*Muir vertical line, two lines on page 139*]

"Color 141 232"

[*"The Beach Again," 93-94*]

Thoreau finds the sea of all colors; he quotes English artist William Gilpin in affirmation. [*Muir vertical line, more than two lines*]

[*"The Sea and the Desert," 152*]

"I never saw an autumnal landscape so beautifully painted as this was." [*Muir vertical line, five lines*]

"Weather etc. 144"

[*"The Beach Again," 95*]

Thoreau quotes Humboldt on Columbus as he approached the New World: "The grateful coolness of the evening air, the ethereal purity of the starry firmament, the balmy fragrance of flowers." [*Muir vertical line, three lines*]

"Sea life — 151"

[*"The Beach Again," 99*]

Thoreau invokes testimony of naturalists that "the sea, and not the land, is the principal seat of life." [*Muir vertical line, three lines, broken*]

"Gardens — 154"

[*"Across the Cape," 102*]

"When the roses were in bloom, these patches in the midst of the sand displayed such a profusion of blossoms, mingled with the aroma of the bayberry, that no Italian or other artificial rose-garden could equal them." [*Muir vertical line, two lines*]

"Across the sea 213"

[*"The Sea and the Desert," 140*]

Thoreau thinks that he can see Spain.

“Sandhills 247”

[“Provincetown,” 161-62]

Thoreau cites “Description of the Eastern Coast” on the role of beach grass in forming sand dunes. [*Muir vertical line, eight lines*]

“Cod 258”

[“Provincetown,” 169]

Thoreau encounters cod drying in front yards of houses and in stacks on wharves. He ridicules the rumored practice of feeding cod’s heads to cows.

“Pilgrims 311”

[“Provincetown,” 202]

Thoreau makes the point that the Pilgrims of Plymouth were pioneers, not explorers, “and the ancestors of pioneers, in a far grander enterprise.”

“Boston 325”

[“Provincetown,” 211-15]

Arriving by steamer, Thoreau describes the Boston commercial scene.

“Last Pgs good 326”

[“Provincetown,” 211-15]

Muir refers to the conclusion, pages 326-31, wherein Thoreau reflects on his visits. Thoreau says he prefers to come to Cape Cod in autumn when the atmosphere is clearer, the storms more prevalent. He foresees the day when this will be a prime resort. “But this shore will never be more attractive than it is now.”

[*Muir vertical line, last six lines*]

* * * * *

Appendix B**John Muir’s Index to Thoreau’s *Cape Cod* (Houghton Mifflin, 1906)**

Explanation: Same as Appendix A.

“57 Seawaves like 1000 waterfalls along shore”

["The Beach," 44]

"The waves broke on the bars at some distance from the shore . . . like a thousand waterfalls." [*Muir vertical line, six lines*]

"[5]8 Breakers like droves of wild horses of Neptune
rushing to shore with white manes streaming—
& sea weeds like tails of sea cows"

["The Beach," 45]

As above, Muir is paraphrasing Thoreau. [*Muir vertical line, 16 lines*]

"[5]9 Cape Cod man"

["The Beach," 45]

Thoreau encounters a "wrecker" looking for driftwood, whose face "was like an old sail endowed with life—a hanging-cliff of weather-beaten flesh." [*Muir vertical line, two lines*] "He looked as if he sometimes saw a dough-nut, but never descended to comfort; too grave to laugh, too tough to cry; as indifferent as a clam—like a sea-clam with hat on and legs, that was out walking the strand." [*Muir vertical line, four lines*]

"68 Marine plants"

["The Beach," 52]

"This kelp, oar-weed, tangle, devil's-apron, sole-leather, or ribbon-weed, —as various species are called." [*Muir vertical line, two lines*. Muir also places *vertical line* by next sentence, which begins, "All that is told."] "One species of kelp, according to Bory St. Vincent, has a stem fifteen hundred feet long." [*Muir horizontal line*]

"71 Waves 156. 177. 186 316"

["The Beach," 55]

Thoreau's simile, notes of gulls are like "a ragged shred of ocean music tossed aloft on the spray," must have reminded Muir of waves. [*Muir horizontal line*]

["The Highland Light," 123]

Thoreau compares bay and ocean surfs. "When the waves run very high it is impossible to get a boat off . . . for it will often be completely covered by the curving edge of the approaching breaker as by an arch." [*Muir vertical line, two lines*]

["The Sea and the Desert," 140]

"We wished to associate with the Ocean until it lost the pond-like look." Muir also indexes this in *Cape Cod* under "*Sea looks like lake.*" [Muir vertical line, two lines] After quoting "'the countless smilings of the ocean waves,'" Thoreau puns, "though some of them were pretty broad grins." [Muir vertical line, two lines]

["The Sea and the Desert," 147]

"The waves forever rolling to the land are too far-travelled and untamable to be familiar." [Muir vertical line, three lines]

["Provincetown," 170(?)]

Cape Cod ends on page 273. Muir's reference to page 316 falls in the "Miscellanies" section of this volume on the first page of "Thomas Carlyle and His Works." Here Thoreau tells of Carlyle's conversation with nature in Wordsworth country with "the last lapses of Atlantic billows." [Muir vertical line, two lines] See *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer and Edwin Moser, with Alexander Kern (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 219. It is possible Muir made a mistake, meaning page 216 instead of 316, which would reference the "Provincetown" chapter of *Cape Cod*; however, waves are absent here.

"74 Lit. 89, 97. 101. 113"

[Note: "Lit." is Muir's abbreviation for "Literature."]

["The Beach," 57]

"though the wind still blowed as hard and the breakers ran as high as before." [Muir horizontal line]

["The Wellfleet Oysterman," 69]

Hearing from the Wellfleet Oysterman of an earthquake that "cracked the pans of the ponds," Thoreau responded, "I did not remember to have read of this." [Muir vertical line, one line]

["The Wellfleet Oysterman," 76]

That night Thoreau "could not distinguish the roar which was proper to the ocean from that which was due to the wind alone." [Muir vertical line, two lines] "Hollow, between me and the ocean, and suspecting" [Muir horizontal line]

["The Wellfleet Oysterman," 79]

Thoreau "learned that our hospitable entertainers did at least transiently harbor the suspicion that we were the men." The robbers of the Provincetown Bank, that is! [Muir horizontal line]

["The Beach Again," 89]

Thoreau watches piping plovers, noting that "The wet sand was covered with small skipping Sea Fleas, which apparently make a part of their food." [*Muir vertical line, seven lines*] I am indebted to my friend Robert Prescott, Director of the Massachusetts Audubon Society Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, for identifying Sea Fleas as Beach Fleas, *Talorchestia megalophthalma*, and for confirming that they are eaten by piping plovers, as Thoreau suspects. Thoreau also saw what "may have been a Phalarope." "It was a little creature thus to sport with the ocean, but it was as perfect a success in its way as the breakers in theirs." [*Muir vertical line, three lines*] Muir also indexes this page under "*Shore birds*." Helen Cruickshank cites this same paragraph in her *Thoreau on Birds* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 297.

"83 Oysters"

["The Wellfleet Oysterman," 65]

"The old man said that the oysters were liable to freeze in the winter, if planted too high; but if it were not 'so cold as to strain their eyes' they were not injured." [*Muir vertical line, three lines*]

"102 Bayberries"

["The Beach Again," 80]

Thoreau quotes Robert Beverley's *History of Virginia* (1705): "'The melting of these berries is said to have been first found out by a surgeon in New England, who performed wonderful things with a salve made of them.'" [*Muir vertical line, three lines on page 103 where all but first word of quotation appears*]

"[1]09 Pebbles"

["The Beach Again," 85]

Thoreau filled his pocket with pebbles, discarding those whose dryness dulled their beauty. "I have also seen very perfect pebbles of brick, and bars of Castile soap from a wreck rolled into perfect cylinders, and still spirally streaked with red, like a barber's pole." [*Muir vertical line, six lines*]

heads

"[1]11 Tails of *Limulus* used by Ind[ian]s as arrow-"

["The Beach Again," 87]

This refers to Horseshoe Crab, *Limulus polyphemus*. [*Muir horizontal line*]

“[1]13 *Shore birds*”

[“The Beach Again,” 89]

See above, last item under “Lit.”

“[1]14 *Wrecks 125. 158. 161*”

[“The Beach Again,” 90]

“We saw this forenoon a part of the wreck of a vessel, probably the Franklin.”

[*Muir vertical line, two lines*] One wrecker showed Thoreau the pear and plum trees in his garden, gifts of salvage.

[“The Beach Again,” 98]

“Yet this same placid Ocean . . . will ere long be lashed into sudden fury.” [*Muir vertical line, two lines*] “It will ruthlessly heave these vessels to and fro, break them in pieces in its sandy or stony jaws.”

[“The Highland Light,” 124-25]

“Over this bare Highland the wind has full sweep. Even in July it blows the wings over the heads of the young turkeys.” [*Muir vertical line, three lines*] “It was said in 1794 that more vessels were cast away on the east shore of Truro than anywhere in Barnstable County. . . . [S]ometimes more than a dozen wrecks are visible from this point at one time.”

[“The Highland Light,” 126]

The fleet of pirate Bellamy wrecked on a bar off Wellfleet in 1717. A survivor supposedly returned each spring and autumn to tap a hidden stash of gold. [*Muir vertical line, three lines*]

“[1]19 *Color of sea*”

[“The Beach Again,” 93]

“To-day it was the Purple Sea. . . . There were distinct patches of the color of a purple grape with the bloom rubbed off.” [*Muir vertical line, three lines*]

“[1]21 *Nothing remarkable done in prosaic mood 123*”

[“The Beach Again,” 95]

[*Muir vertical line, two lines*] The Princeton edition restores “memorable” for remarkable. See “Textual Notes” 95.7 on page 383.

["The Beach Again," 96]

Muir's only mark on page 123 is beside "I felt that I was a land animal." [*Muir vertical line, two lines*] His reference to a land animal may relate to Sir Humphrey Gilbert's last words when his ship was hit by a storm, "'We are as near to Heaven by sea as by land.'" which Thoreau quotes (97).

"[1]22 Ships"

["The Beach Again," 95-96]

Thoreau comments on what great distances vessels could be seen across sea.

"[1]24 Shallow seas"

["The Beach Again," 97]

Thoreau is surprised to find Massachusetts [Cape Cod] Bay so shallow: "Off Billingsgate Point I could have touched the bottom with a pole." He gives the depth of the English Channel at 180 feet. [*Muir vertical line, three lines*]

"[1]69 Lighthouse"

["The Highland Light," 132-33]

While staying at Highland Light, Thoreau accompanied the keeper while he lighted the lamps, and learned of the challenges of keeping them shining.

"[1]77 Sea looks like lake to those seeing 1st time
& vast only to those who see O 188"

["The Sea and the Desert," 139-40]

"We wished to associate with the Ocean until it lost the pond-like look which it wears to a countryman." [*Muir vertical line, two lines*]

["The Sea and the Desert," 148-49]

"The ocean is a wilderness reaching round the globe," Thoreau concluded. [*Muir vertical line, six lines, broken*]

"[1]93 Color"

["The Sea and the Desert," 152-53]

Thoreau is stunned by Provinceland Dunes: "I never saw an autumnal landscape so beautifully painted as this was. It was like the richest rug imaginable. . . . There was the incredibly bright red of the Huckleberry, and the reddish brown of the

Bayberry, mingled with the bright and living green of small Pitch-Pines." And more. [Muir vertical line, nine lines]

"269-73 Tourists to seashore v.g. [very good]"

[*"Provincetown,"* 214-15]

"The time must come when this coast will be a place of resort. . . . At present it is wholly unknown to the fashionable world. . . . But this shore will never be more attractive than it is now." [*The only Muir marks in these five pages occur in the last paragraph, two lines and final seven lines*]

Notes

- 1 The railroad came to Sandwich in 1848 and Hyannis in 1854. Henry C. Kittredge, *Cape Cod* (1930; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 154.

For a detailed account of Thoreau's lecture see *Nantucket Inquirer*, 1 January 1855 [2]. On 15 September 1975 I read this newspaper summary and review of the lecture at the Atheneum on Nantucket, where Thoreau lectured; it is published in *The Thoreau Society Bulletin*, Winter 1984 [1-3] thanks to Don Jordan. Thoreau's lecture trip, never a part of *Cape Cod*, was recorded in his *Journal* (25-29 December 1854), a section Muir read, indexing one item, "97 Persecution, baptists g[ood]," which refers to Thoreau's comment on verses by Peter Folger in Obed Macy's *History of Nantucket* (Boston: Hilliard, Bray, 1835) that God would punish "for the sin of persecution and the like, the banishing and whipping of godly men." Muir must have recalled his father's chastisement of him as a boy—see John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (1913; Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1965), especially 69. Muir also placed vertical lines beside the last four stanzas by Folger in Thoreau's *Journal* (VII, 97-98). Muir read and indexed passages from the fourteen-volume *Journal* edited by Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen and published as part of the 1906 Houghton Mifflin edition (Boston) of *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*.

"The 1857 Excursion" from Thoreau's *Journal* (12-22 June) was not included in *Cape Cod* until 1951, when W. W. Norton published an edition assembled by Dudley C. Lunt—see "Historical Introduction" in *Cape Cod*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), 295. That Muir read this is indicated by his identifying one and the same item with a vertical line in the margin of the text and in his index of this account: "397 Bobolink song 446," which refers to "A child asked concerning a bobolink, 'What makes he sing so sweet, Mother? Do he eat flowers?'" (20 June 1857; IX, 446). Bobolinks are still prevalent on Cape Cod.

Thoreau kept journals of his Cape Cod tours. Those of 1849 and 1859 were mostly removed from his journal in preparation for lecturing and publishing—see William Rossi, "Historical Introduction" in *Journal 3: 1848-1851*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer, Mark R. Patterson, and William Rossi (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 484-85, 490. Thus, they were not part of the 1906 edition of the *Journal*. His

- 5-18 July 1855 record is in the 1906 *Journal*, VII, 432-43; Muir neither marked nor indexed any of these pages.
- 2 Thoreau, *Journal*, 27 June 1856. Muir notes nothing on this date, though he marks the last paragraph of 26 June 1856 (*vertical line, four lines*). See also Daniel Ricketson, *The History of New Bedford* (New Bedford: Privately Printed, 1858), 125-29. Ricketson, whom Thoreau had been visiting in New Bedford, accompanied him to Naushon. Had Thoreau lived longer, we can imagine his returning to Naushon with Emerson. In his *Journal* Thoreau also mentions seeing Gay Head on Martha's Vineyard "with my glass" (VIII, 393).
 - 3 Thoreau lectured on Cape Cod in Massachusetts on 23 and 30 January 1850 in Concord; 18 February 1850 in South Danvers; 6 December 1850 in Newburyport; 1 January 1851 in Clinton; and in Portland, Maine, on 15 January 1851. See Raymond R. Borst, *The Thoreau Log* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), 162, 163, 174, 176, 177, respectively. For details of these lectures see Bradley P. Dean and Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Thoreau's Lectures Before *Walden*: An Annotated Calendar" in *Studies in the American Renaissance 1995*, ed. Joel Myerson (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1995), 127-228.
 - 4 See "Historical Introduction" in *Cape Cod* (Princeton), 249.
 - 5 Muir's copy of Thoreau's *Cape Cod* is in the Rare Book Department of The Library of The Huntington, San Marino, California. Date on title page is MDCCCXCVII [1897]; copyrights, 1864 and 1893. The volume contains no inscription nor dates of acquisition or reading. I am grateful for permission of The Library of The Huntington to quote from this book and to reproduce Muir's index in my Appendix A.
 - 6 Muir's copy is in his library with the Holt-Atherton Special Collections (HASC), University of the Pacific Libraries, Stockton, California. Again, this copy contains neither inscription nor dates of acquisition or reading. I have related the history of Muir's purchase of this set in "John Muir and Thoreau's Maine," *The Concord Saunterer* 3 (1995): 113.
 - 7 Letter, John Muir to Louie Muir, 13 September 1898, Duluth, Minnesota, in John Muir Papers (JMP), HASC. All quotations from unpublished material in The John Muir Collections, as well as the information in my Appendix B, are by permission of HASC, copyright 1984 Muir-Hanna Trust.
 - 8 John Muir Journal (holograph), 12 September 1898, JMP. Subsequent references to his journal appear as MJM parenthetically in the text. The date is only given when unclear in text.
 - 9 Letter, John Muir to Helen Muir, 10 September 1898, Montana, JMP.
 - 10 Letter, John Muir to Louie Muir, 13 September 1898, Duluth, Minnesota, JMP.
 - 11 Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 20 September 1898, Boston, Massachusetts, JMP.
 - 12 See William A. McKenzie, *Dining Car Line to the Pacific: An Illustrated History of the NP Railway's "Famously Good" Food, with 150 Authentic Recipes* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990); *Great Northern Secrets* (no publisher, no date). Connie Hoffman, Secretary of the Great Northern Railway Historical Society, Berkley, Michigan, dates this booklet of dining car recipes to 1932. She has no menus before 1920 in her collection. James E. Vance, Jr., *The North American Railroad: Its Origin, Evolution and Geography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995) and Sarah H. Gordon, *Passage to Union: How Railroads Transformed American Life*,

1829-1929 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996) offer good overviews.

- 13 Letter, John Muir to Louie Muir, 13 September 1898, Duluth, Minnesota, JMP.
- 14 Though Muir does not identify his steamer, it was most likely one of the three iron ones—*India*, *China*, *Japan*—of the Anchor Line of the Erie and Western Transportation Company. Their 1896 brochure gives a flavor of what Muir experienced: "Running water, electric lights and the best of beds in each room. . . . Wide promenade decks extend entirely around the steamer. . . . The Excellence of the Table is an especial feature of this line." And later under "Of Interest to Tourists": "the epicurean who enjoys a fish diet will appreciate the delicious Lake Trout and Whitefish always included in the menu on the steamers of this line." My gratitude to C. Patrick Labadie, Director, Canal Park Marine Museum, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Duluth, Minnesota. The menus consulted from this period show little change.
- 15 For a photograph of the Boston and Providence Railroad Station in Park Square and for information on the construction of South Station see Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History* (1959; Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), 102 and 189. Until South Station was completed in 1900, railroads had various terminals.

This Adams House (1883) closed in 1927 and was demolished in 1931. Calvin Coolidge resided here while serving Massachusetts as lieutenant governor and governor. A former Adams House occupied this site from 1846 to 1883, the successor of the Lamb Tavern. See John Harris, *Historic Walks in Old Boston* (1982; Chester, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 1989), 192-93. A closed, disheveled Paramount Theatre (built 1932) sits here now (13 September 1995), two blocks southeast of the Common.
- 16 William M. Canby (1831-1904) discovered a new species of Hawthorn in Wilmington, Delaware, in October 1898, which Sargent named *Crataegus Canbyi* in his honor. I cannot verify that Muir and Sargent were with him at the time, though it is likely. For a description of this plant and a biography of Canby, see Charles S. Sargent, *The Silva of North America* (1902; Magnolia, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1947), 41-42. A Drawing of the plant by Charles Edward Faxon follows on an unnumbered page.
- 17 Letter, John Muir to Charles S. Sargent, 11 May 1898, Martinez, California, JMP. Currently, none of *The Silva of North America* is in Muir's library at the University of the Pacific.
- 18 Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 2 June 1898, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, JMP. Muir sent his review of *The Silva of North America* to Bliss Perry, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, 4 Park Street, Boston, Massachusetts, on 2 March 1903. Perry replied on 19 March that he was pleased. This lengthy review appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1903 (9-22), while Muir and Sargent were traveling around the world. See Letter, John Muir to Charles S. Sargent, 1 March 1903, Martinez, California, JMP.
- 19 Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 13 July 1898, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, JMP.
- 20 Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 15 June 1898, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, JMP.
- 21 William B. Bacon and Charles S. Sargent—identified incorrectly as G. S. Sargent—came down by buggy from Barnstable "one summer day" (the year is not given) and bought property jointly; a toss of the coin decided that Sargent would have the house and Bacon the open point to the south. So relates Winslow Carlton in "Bankers' Row" in Mary Lou Smith, ed., *Woods Hole Reflections* (Woods Hole, Mass.: Woods Hole

Historical Collection, 1983), 144, 146. On page 13 an undated photograph (probably from 1875) shows an earlier form of the Sargent house with carriage house on a treeless lot with stone walls. Today the house cannot be seen from the road. Page 23 offers a view of Little Harbor in 1896. Carlton recounts the same story in "A Stroll Through Woods Hole in the 'Twenties'" in Mary Lou Smith, ed., *The Book of Falmouth* (Falmouth, Mass.: Falmouth Historical Commission, 1986), 522. The Sargent House is shown as it appeared in 1895 on page 486 (captioned "Abner Davis' inn"); a contemporary view is on page 523.

My query to the Woods Hole Historical Commission led to their discovery that the Charles S. Sargent home had been miscited as that of G. S. Sargent. (Letter, J. S. Gaines, Archivist, to J. Parker Huber, 12 January 1995, Woods Hole, Massachusetts.) This house is now known as the Rowe House. The current (1995) owner, Mrs. William S. Rowe of Cincinnati, Ohio, has been here virtually every summer of her life since her birth in 1918. Her great-grandfather was William B. Bacon (1823-1906). Her grandfather was Robert Bacon (1860-1919; see *Dictionary of American Biography*; hereafter, *DAB*), a partner of J. P. Morgan and assistant Secretary of State, 1905-1909. Muir and Robert Bacon had Theodore Roosevelt as a mutual friend; Bacon married Martha W. Cowdin (1859-1940). Their daughter, Martha B. Bacon (1890-1967), on 2 June 1914 married George Whitney (1865-1963), a banker and a president of J. P. Morgan & Company. Their daughter, Martha Phyllis Whitney, married William S. Rowe (1916-1988), also a banker (President of the Fifth Third Bank, Cincinnati, Ohio) in 1939. After Robert Bacon died, his widow, Mrs. Rowe's grandmother, bought the Sargent House.

- 22 S. B. Sutton, *Charles Sprague Sargent and the Arnold Arboretum* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970). 20. Sargent's Cape Cod connection came as news to Sutton when we spoke 29 March 1995.
- 23 *DAB*, Charles Sprague Sargent; *DAB*, Guy Lowell, reports marriage in April 1898; Thanks to Arnold Arboretum librarians Carol David and Rebecca Anderson, my source for dates is Emma Worcester Sargent, *Epes Sargent of Gloucester and his Descendants* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 158. For Andrew and Charles see *Epes Sargent*, 158-60 and Harvard College Class Reports and Bibliographical Files, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 24 *Boston Evening Record*, 29 December 1903, 6.
- 25 His brother, Charles S. Sargent, who carried his father's name, died 13 February 1959.
- 26 New York tobacco tycoon John Anderson gave the island and fifty thousand dollars for the school. Edward Lurie, *Louis Agassiz: A Life in Science* (1960; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988), 380-81. I. Thomas Buckley, *Penikese: Island of Hope* (N. Chatham, Mass.: Stony Brook Publishing and Productions, 1997). Letter, Kate N. Daggett to John Muir, 19 April 1873, Hot Springs, Arkansas, JMP, tells Muir about the school.
- 27 Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 25 August 1903, St. Moritz, Switzerland, JMP.
- 28 *DAB*. David Starr Jordan, *The Days of a Man* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, N.Y.: World Book Company, 1922). 2 vols. Penikese 1:108-19; marriage, 132—this is the only mention of Susan Bowen in his autobiography. Little is known of Susan Bowen. She attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary from 1861 until her graduation in 1864; she taught there from 1868 to 1875. See catalogues of Mount Holyoke Female

Seminary and biographical notes in Mount Holyoke College Archives, South Hadley, Massachusetts—my gratitude to archives librarian Patricia J. Albright. Bowen was married in her hometown, Peru, Massachusetts. See also David Starr Jordan, *Science Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1899), Chapter 5, “Agassiz at Penikese,” 133-152.

- 29 For ouzels see Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (1945; Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 198. *Scribner's Monthly* featured Muir's “The Humming-Bird of the California Water-Falls” in February 1878. For Merrill see Jordan, *The Days of a Man* 1:217. For Muir on Merrill see “Words From An Old Friend,” in Catharine Merrill, *The Man Shakespeare and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: The Bowen-Merrill Company Publishers, 1902), 32-38. The first chapter of this book, pages 1-5, is a “Biographical Notice” of her. Merrill (1824-1900) held the Demia Butler Chair in English Literature at Northwestern Christian University, now Butler University, in Indianapolis, from 1870 to 1883. (See “Endowed Chairs at Butler University,” Rare Books and Special Collections, The Irwin Library, Butler University. This I take as the most reliable source, though the above “Biographical Notice” has her at Butler until 1885 and her obituary in *The Indianapolis News*, 30 May 1900, 4 and 11, puts her at Butler in 1873. See also Katharine Merrill Graydon, *Catharine Merrill: Life and Letters* [Greenfield, Ind.: Mitchell Company, 1934].)
- 30 Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness*, 198. Jordan even saw the Muir Glacier in Alaska; Jordan, *Days of a Man*, 1:578.
- 31 Letter, David Starr Jordan to John Muir, 10 February 1903, Stanford, California. Jordan might have been on the Alaskan Harriman Expedition in 1899 with Muir, but he declined (*Days of a Man*, II:297). Jordan's tribute to Muir appeared in *Sierra*, January 1916, 7.
- 32 “I am quite sure that Olmsted never met Muir,” editor Charles E. Beveridge wrote me on 24 March 1996. Beveridge added that “Olmsted expressed a desire to do so at a time of controversy at Yosemite.” Biographer Laura Wood Roper concurs that there was no meeting in her letter to me of 21 April 1996. For further information see Beveridge's comments in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, Volume 5, *The California Frontier: 1863-1865*, ed. Victoria Post Ranney et al (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1990), 466-69 and 473n60: Frederick Law Olmsted to Richard Watson Gilder, 11 July 1889.

There is no recovered correspondence between Muir and Olmsted. While no books of Frederick Law Olmsted are in Muir's library, there is a copy of *The Century Magazine*, October 1893, with an essay on Olmsted by M. G. van Rensselaer, 860-67, which presumably Muir read yet did not mark. Though Mary Olmsted continued to live at 99 Warren Street until her death in 1913, Muir does not mention seeing her. See Elizabeth Stevenson, *Park Maker: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1977), 426-27; Laura Wood Roper, *Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), 474-75, 478.

- 33 Letters, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 26 February 1897, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts; Walter H. Page to John Muir, 4 March 1897, Boston, Massachusetts, JMP.
- 34 Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 22 June 1897, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, JMP.

- 35 Letter John Muir to Wanda Muir, 22 September 1898, Cranberry, North Carolina, JMP.
- 36 Letter, John Muir to Walter H. Page, 10 January 1902, Martinez, California, JMP; in William Frederic Badè, *The Life and Letters of John Muir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), II:341-43.
- 37 Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 28 October 1898, New York, New York. JMJ, 25 October 1898.
- 38 Letters, John Muir to Walter Page, 9 May 1905, Martinez, California; Walter Page to John Muir, 21 December 1905, Englewood, New Jersey—his belated thank you. In 1899 Page joined the new publishing house of Doubleday, Page and Company in New York. The next year he founded *The World's Work* of which he was editor until 1913. DAB. B. J. Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1922-1925), 3 volumes. B. J. Hendrick, *The Training of an American: The Earlier Life and Letters of Walter H. Page, 1855-1913* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928) contains four of his letters to Muir, 305-7. Walter H. Page, *A Publisher's Confession* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1923) does not mention Muir. Ellen B. Ballou, *The Building of the House: Houghton Mifflin's Formative Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 457, views Muir in the *Atlantic Monthly* as "[o]ne of Page's singular triumphs."
- 39 Letter, John Muir to Louie Muir, 25 September 1898, Cloudland, North Carolina, JMP.

WOODSWOMAN III

Book Three of the Woodswoman's Adventures



ANNE LABASTILLE

Home Places: *Excerpts from Woodswoman III*

Anne LaBastille

[**Note:** *Woodswoman III* (1997) continues ecologist Anne LaBastille's account of her longstanding engagement with nature in the complex, dynamic, and increasingly threatened Adirondack wilderness. It is the worthy successor to *Woodswoman* (1976) and *Beyond Black Bear Lake* (1987). Dr. LaBastille selected the following excerpts in part because of their Thoreauvian connections. *Woodswoman III* is published by West of the Wind Publications, Westport, NY.]

Kestrel Crest Farm

"Lila" hovered intently above the two electric lines and a power pole that stuck out of the farm pond. Her blue-gray wings quivered rapidly as she shrilled, "kee, kee, kee." The little falcon frolicked in beautiful curves around the object of her attention, swept down to the water's surface, then swooped up to settle atop the tall pole.

A few feet away perched a male. He was smaller, less exuberant, yet sleek and glamorous with his russet back and tail, creamy speckled breast, and lightly tinted, salmon-rose sides. Lila was the more robust and chunky of the two—eleven inches long compared to his nine. I called the male "Windhover," an old-time colloquial name and the title of a nineteenth-century poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Suddenly Lila sprang into the air and flew rapidly to the top of a large tree which marked the southern edge of my farm. She sat swinging on a slender high twig. Now the male shrilled and playfully dove at her. Then Windhover grabbed hold of a twig, too. The two birds rested.

Lila hopped provocatively behind a branch heavy with buds. The male followed. I had no doubt they were mating in their airy bower. Minutes later, Lila flew powerfully toward the utility pole in the pond. She made one sweeping circle

as a precaution, then glided precisely into the wood duck nest box nailed there. It was her time to inspect this most peculiar nesting site.

I lowered my binocs and sighed contentedly. It was the fourth spring since I'd purchased my alternate winter residence that the kestrels had nested here. To me, they meant the start of spring and a ritual as passionate and elegant as any in the bird world.

When I bought this farm, I purposely waited a year before naming it. I wanted to see which wild creature, plant, or natural event most evoked the essence of this place. The kestrels won, wings down. So I called it "Kestrel Crest Farm."

I'd found the ramshackle homestead after searching for three summers around the Lake Champlain valley. A great deal of thought went into this hunt. My ecological consulting and book business were growing and expanding nationally and internationally. My lecturing took me all over the country. In fact, "Thoreau and the Woodswoman" is the public's favorite of my seven topics. It was harder and harder to manage all this from my remote cabin in winter.

Ask yourself, dear reader, how you would handle it on a January day with wind chill of twenty-two degrees below zero, trying to prepare for a lecture trip, say, to West Virginia University? You'd have to sort your slides using a flashlight, pack a suitcase with neat business clothes, prepare at least two boxes of books for autograph parties, plus readying a slide projector, carousel trays, a handbag with tickets and money, food for the dogs whether they stayed at a kennel or went with you, two pillows, gifts for possible hostess or friend, and a decent winter coat and boots. All this would be heaped onto a toboggan to be pulled over the ice, two miles down the lake, while hoping a blizzard or rainstorm wouldn't turn the trip treacherous.

Logistically, I needed a place to work that was near a road, with electricity (to run projector, iron fancy clothes), a phone and fax (for winter book orders), and proximity by turnpike to an airport (two hours drive max). It was important to review my slides on a large screen with a projector. Also, I needed more space to store boxes of my books, writing and business files, and outdoor gear. My guiding service maintained four or five sleeping bags, pads, tents, life vests, and a lot of cooking gear.

On another, more elemental and ecological level, I craved winters with more sun, less acid rain and snow, and milder temps; summers with a long growing season. A country place with good soil and spring water would enable me to grow much of my food and pump my own water—without pesticides, chemicals, or chlorine. Self-sufficiency was uppermost in my mind, as was good health.

Now, lest the reader think that I'd sold my log cabin and was moving permanently into a more civilized setting, let me hasten to say, NO! The cabin is still my primary permanent residence. It is my writing studio and retreat, my spiritual sanctuary, my sacred space—much as a cabin in Kentucky was for

Thomas Merton, the priest, hermit, and author, and as a cabin at Walden Pond was for Henry David Thoreau. I have no intention of ever leaving and built it to last my lifetime.

Nevertheless on April 18, 1988, I drove along a dirt road and up the narrow drive to the crest where my “new” old farmhouse stood. The large stretch of lawn and nearby hay fields were already greening up, although patches of snow lingered in the ditches and gullies. I noted two kestrels flying above a big tree. They had just arrived to build a temporary home for summer, whereas I had just arrived to prepare a temporary home for winter.

From the crest, I could look out toward the Green Mountains of Vermont. Lake Champlain lay hidden in the deep fold between New York and this adjacent state. The mountains stretched away in shades of denim blue and mauve. I eased out of my truck and walked with the dogs to the farm pond. It looked powder blue under the early spring sky. A fringe of cattails poked like platinum spikes from the cold water. The sun was setting behind me while red-wings whistled cheerily.

Unlocking the door, I moved swiftly through the two-story, empty, cold, dank, smelly building. I suddenly realized I might have made one of the worst mistakes of my life! The place was filthy; no welcome note from the past owner awaited me. No instructions lay on the counter about anything. I’d purchased the eighty-five-year-old farmhouse after only two visits and barely knew where the water pump, master fuse box, garage keys, and septic system were. Huge watermarks stained every ceiling inside. The roof showed shabby shingles with probably dozens of leaks. Cobwebs and dust piles were everywhere. Scarred, old gray linoleum covered the floors. Yet when I’d seen the place earlier, carpeting and antique pieces had given an ambiance of a “quaint old farmstead.”

Next morning I planned an assault on the house, making a long list of “Things To Do.” April 19 found me scurrying from room to room in rubber gloves, with a bandanna over my nose and mouth, carrying pails of soapy water mixed with Comet, Clorox, and Mr. Clean, plus dusters and brooms. The dogs were tied outdoors, for fear they’d irritate their paws on the scrubbed floors. By afternoon the smell of cleansers was positively toxic. But the bathroom glistened. Every room was free of cobwebs and dust balls. Windows shone. The power was on. So was the water pump. The old house smelled clean.

The silence was palpable. A spring sunset slanted through tall old windows. My family mementos and furniture—so long in storage—felt friendly around me. They completely filled the six small rooms. I needed to buy nothing! The dogs dozed on pastel rugs. I tried to imagine what the cabin looked like right now. It would certainly be freezing cold with some snow and ice on the ground and lake. No birds would be singing. Not a sign of green anywhere. However, my sleeping loft would look enticing with its down quilt and woolen blankets. I started to feel homesick. No! That would never do.

Little by little over the next three years, as time and finances allowed, I fixed up the farmhouse. I also made a dent in the cluttered outbuildings. There

were two huge, eighty-five-year-old barns with connecting workroom, a tottering chicken coop, one pesticide-filled garden shed, and the garbage-clogged garage. Each was filled with stacks of magazines, old lumber, broken furniture, vehicles, and cracked dishes, having served as residential dump sites for each owner. I took what must have been hundreds of loads of junk to the local landfill, sold seven thousand pounds of old metal to a scrap dealer, disposed of the chemicals responsibly, and burned piles of trash.

I never stopped working. I never got bored. Winters I had projects galore. What had I done with all those idle winter hours at the cabin, I wondered, besides carry firewood, shovel snow, chop holes in the ice for water, and write? Life there now seemed so simple, restful, and Thoreauvian.

New and satisfying compensations, however, filled those early spring days. Dawns blushing soft, pink, misty, fresh, and alive with hundreds of bird songs. Bluebirds nesting in a box right out the kitchen window. Tree swallows by the dozen liquidly twittering to their young lined up on the electric wires. Bass surfacing in the pond under willows while peepers trilled. Red-and-brown house finches frivolously rearing a total of twelve chicks on my front porch. Sober gray phoebes dutifully feeding four fuzzballs in a nest over the night light on my back porch. Wood frogs clacking and woodcocks peeting on cold, clear spring evenings under a half moon.

Every spring thereafter Lila and Windhover would show up to perform their glorious courtship. They trusted my farm and its wood duck box, strangely placed on a power pole in a pond, as their rightful nursery and home. More and more I began to identify with these small, strong, defiant falcons, flying into the wind.

The Farm and the Cabin

Working on an old farmstead part time taught me new and insightful lessons about Nature. It threw certain "ecological imperatives" into my lap. And it showed me the dramatic contrast between cabin and farm. I gradually came to realize that my thirty acres of old-growth forest bordered in back by wilderness and fronted by a remote, roadless lake doesn't need me for anything. The natural resources are stable, diverse, and have been in place since the last Ice Age. The biological laws function well here. I take very little from the land and the land takes very little from me. I don't try to change or domesticate my surroundings. I never feel "in charge" of these wildlands, since they "belong" to a larger complex ecosystem and not to a mere human landowner. I'm much more a spectator of nature here, swimming with loons and beavers, hooting and howling with owls and coyotes. This makes me feel a greater part of the natural ecosystem than I am at my farm.

On the farm, however, I am constantly manipulating this cut-over, farmed, pastured, open land. And the land is manipulating me. I have planted eighteen

hundred tree seedlings in the course of eight years, trying to make windbreaks, stabilize banks and ditches, provide privacy, and turn worn-out fields into wildlife habitat. The Scotch pines, European larch, poplars, and many bushes that provide food for wildlife are exotics from other areas or countries. On one hand, I feel this has upset the original environment. On the other, I know that both exotic and native species of trees make soil more stable, useful, and attractive. They also counteract effects of global warming.

Still, the overall effect is to make me feel that I'm domesticating nature and putting my imprint on it, which distances me from that pure, exhilarating sensation of being part of a primeval community in the wilderness. That mystical sense of communion with raw Life.

At Kestrel Crest Farm, my life is dictated by the great Imperatives of Green Grass, Weeds, and Fruit. These are demanding, daunting labor laws.

The farmhouse and pond are surrounded by five acres of rolling, lush lawn. It was here when I came and it's going to stay. However, its care is a stern Imperative. I'm well aware of current ecological criticism against Americans' mania for green grass, against the use of chemical herbicides, fertilizers, and lawn services that contaminate ground water and poison birds. I know about the millions of gallons of gas and oil burned to run mowers and weed whackers each summer in the United States and the air pollution and acid rain they cause. None of these machines have catalytic converters, filters, or any other device to cleanse nitrous oxides from their exhausts. Carelessly operated mowers and weed whackers also kill thousands of ground-nesting birds, chicks, frogs, small snakes, and rodents with their whirring blades. So I do all I can to reduce the negative effects of mowing.

On the positive side, mowing becomes the most wonderful way to know my land. Seated three feet above the ground, moving at a sensibly slow speed, the sky stretching limitless over my head, and the sun bronzing my skin—I consider it a majestic experience. Alabaster thunderheads sail by. Rainbows come and go. White seagulls dot the distant hayfields. The wind sweeps up from Lake Champlain—cool, damp, and smelling faintly of clay. My tractor, which I named La Tortugua (turtle in Spanish), allows me to keep my fingertips on the pulse of the land.

On July evenings when the dew is light and the breeze is strong, I sometimes turn on its headlights and mow into the dusky twilight and eventual dark. That's when the lawn turns into a sparkling carpet of fireflies. Since these insects only live three weeks or so, the sight is a breathtaking treat—one I never see at the cabin. At such times, Mr. Xandor, my German shepherd, plods behind me doggedly wondering when he'll get his supper. It's ten o'clock and his mistress is still going 'round in circles on that infernal noisy machine—mesmerized.

Another Imperative is Weeds in the Gardens. What a surprise it was to discover that I love green plants and gardening. A revelation swept through my

mind, heart, and stomach the first time I watched bare soil sprouting with the fragile green leaves of lettuce, Swiss chard, carrots, beets, dill, beans, radishes, corn, and spinach. The knowledge that I'd be eating fully grown garden produce in a few weeks—food that looked like the colored pictures on the front of seed packets—was awesome. The realization that I had poked tiny seeds into warm, moist earth, covered them, and let sun and rain nourish them into ripe, edible plant food ready to be picked was inspiring. And so, like Thoreau at Walden, "I came to love my rows, my beans. . . . They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus."

I learned to fight weeds so as to have better plant progeny. Sometimes I'd weed through the hot, hazy afternoon until the long-shafted rays of the sun gilded every leaf. Up and down the rows I'd grub—past blue corn with a small fish buried beneath each stalk, alongside zinnias as colorful as a carnival, next to lettuce leaves as translucent as pale green emeralds. My twilight nostalgia was a combination of loneliness, *Weltschmerz*, and country contentment.

I'd glance up at the phoebes calling in the mulberry bushes and the cedar waxwings lisp in the dead elms. Sometimes I'd stay out in the vegetable or flower gardens until it was so dark that the end of the hoe or cultivator disappeared. Only then would I stop so as not to spear my bare toes.

"This was my curious labor all summer," wrote Thoreau, "to make this portion of the earth's surface, which had yielded only . . . sweet wild fruits and pleasant flowers, produce instead this pulse"—"making the earth say beans instead of grass." (In my case, it was blue corn I wanted it to say.)

I manage to wipe out most of the weeds to help my plants. Contrarily, the local wildlife destroys some of my food and flower supply. Baby brown bunnies sneak through the fencing to nibble crisp sweet lettuce. Coons scramble over the fence top and up corn stalks to rip off the juicy cobs. Tiny mice leave toothmarks ringing the tops of beets. Jays peck off sunflower seeds before I can salvage any. Colorado potato bugs munch away leaves on every potato plant. Chipmunks steal crocus bulbs and tulips. Deer would have gobbled everything in sight except that Chekika and Xandor have turned out to be the best garden protectors. Xandor methodically marks the fences and Chekika frequently barks boisterously.

Henry David Thoreau, I conclude, was a lucky gardener. He reported, "My enemies are worms, cool days, and most of all woodchucks."

Come autumn, the Imperative of Ripe Fruits arrives. Every time I drive to the farm in September or October, some crop *has* to be picked before it gets ruined. I dig potatoes, store carrots and beets in dry sand, hang pails of apples and pears in the basement, fill jars with honey, make jam and jelly, pile squashes in screened drawers, stew applesauce, and bake berry pies. Until now, I had never harvested my own food. What a deeply satisfying experience it is.

I've never felt the unpredictability of Nature as keenly as I do at the farm. I keep hoping for a "normal" year, but there never is one. I have witnessed great

fluctuations and unexpected violence from the weather: frequent thunderstorms with terrifying black squall lines and scary lightning, drought so severe that I had to haul dozens of buckets of water from my pond to the gardens and little trees to save them, wind that blew so hard the old house shuddered and thrummed as if about to collapse, precipitation so high that my basement filled with eighteen inches of water and small ditches roared like rivers.

There may be a new and frightening reason for the volatile weather. As our climate warms from air pollution, as the ozone hole expands, and as CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons, or refrigerant gases), continue to nibble away at the ozone layer, the earth will experience more violent changes. Weather fronts will roar through with higher winds, more precipitation, and more significant ups and downs in barometer and temperature readings, than we experience now. It seems inevitable.

Nature holds out no guarantees to farmers, landowners, or wildlife around here. The agricultural land and wood lots lack the ancientness, timelessness, and built-in safeguards of old-growth forests.

One afternoon, mowing about the barns, I saw a dead bird near the road by the old milk house door. I stopped to pick it up and found one of Lila and Windhover's fledglings. The feathers were perfectly placed, no blood, the colors and moustaches so pretty. Grief-stricken, I looked around for what might have killed it. The only explanation, finally, was that the youngster had been hovering too near the barns, a car drove by, or a large hawk swooped down, and the frightened falcon dashed itself into the wall.

One winter brought freezing rain and crusted snow week after week. From my living room, I watched two starving coyotes with bushy tails wander across flat corn fields over stone-hard snow, repeatedly pouncing stiff-legged onto the surface, trying to break through. Inches below their paws was a world of rodents that could have fed them until spring. While wildlife cycles are common among many species and weather fluctuations are always expected, here in the Champlain Valley they seem accentuated. The balance of Nature is continually thrown off.

Meanwhile, while I'm a woodswoman at heart and always will be, I do enjoy precious summer evenings relaxing on my farm porch. I revel in the plush velvet perfection of newly cut lawn atwinkle with fireflies. I sniff the large bouquets of old-fashioned farm flowers which I pick and place on the dining room table—sweet-smelling phlox, day lilies, blue delphiniums, bee balm, and yellow tea roses. Best of all is when I can eat a light supper from my garden: dill and lettuce salad, fresh corn on the cob, new potatoes, and ripe raspberries. In these shining contented moments, life is good.



John Brown

Correcting the Newspapers: Thoreau and "A Plea for Captain John Brown"

David G. Fuller

John Brown and his twenty-one recruits, including two of his sons, fourteen white and five black men, entered the town of Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), on Sunday evening, 16 October 1859, and attempted to incite a major slave insurrection. The next day the insurrectionists, the townspeople, and armed militia from surrounding towns waged battle until Brown and his band were forced to hole up in the federal armory's engine house. Early Tuesday morning, federal troops led by Robert E. Lee and J. E. B. Stuart attacked the engine house and arrested Brown and the remaining insurrectionists. In the end, ten of Brown's company were killed, including his two sons; seven were captured; and five escaped. Three residents of Harpers Ferry, one marine, and a slaveholder were killed. Although the insurrection did not result in a general slave uprising, as Brown had hoped, it did precipitate a state of panic in the North and South.

Shortly after receiving the news that John Brown led what many newspapers claimed to be an insane and fanatical insurrection, Henry Thoreau wrote with a fury for over a week in his journal.¹ Beginning with the entry on 19 October 1859, the day he learned of the insurrection, he expressed his anger at the newspaper reporting and the erroneous news that Brown had been killed in an attempt to mount an organized attack on the institution of slavery. He wrote with such intensity during those days and nights that he even kept a pencil and paper on his nightstand so that he could record his thoughts.² Within just three days of first hearing about Harpers Ferry, Thoreau wrote in his journal over ten thousand words about the incident and soon after composed a "Lecture on the character & actions of Capt. John Brown," which he delivered the evening of 30 October in the vestry of the First Parish meetinghouse in his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts.³ Local abolitionists considered his giving such a lecture inadvisable, but despite their warnings, he went ahead with it. Now considered the first public presenta-

tion in the country in support of Brown, the lecture was presented to a full house, many of whom, it was reported, held no sympathy for Brown.⁴

Two days later, on 1 November, Thoreau presented the lecture at Boston's Tremont Temple to over twenty-five hundred people. Lasting an hour and a half, the lecture was listened to attentively by an enthusiastic audience that interrupted the speech with applause on a number of occasions.⁵ Not all members of the audience were pleased by what they heard, however. In an 8 November review of the lecture, *The Springfield Republican* wrote, "This Thoreau seems to be a thorough fanatic—why don't he imitate Brown and do good by rushing to the gallows?" On 3 November Thoreau presented the lecture at Washburn Hall in Worcester and later forwarded the text of his speech to James Redpath, who was compiling an anthology of essays about the incident, published as *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*.⁶

Cited in our time as the "most eloquent of all Thoreau's occasional addresses"⁷ and "one of the great public addresses in American history,"⁸ the lecture, as the title suggests, was written as a "plea" for Captain John Brown, who was in prison awaiting trial for his part in the Harpers Ferry raid. Thoreau pledged "to correct the tone and the statements of the newspapers," which, he claimed, did injustice to Brown's character and actions.⁹ He charged that the newspaper editors wrote from their "easy chairs" (137), revealing their ignorance of Brown's character, ignoring essential details, showing a lack of regard for Brown, and expressing more concern with politics and with pleasing subscribers than with accurately covering the event or addressing Brown's cause. What made Thoreau indignant was that the newspapers, in his view, missed the point—they apparently lost sight of the inhumanity of slavery amidst political accusations, charges and counter charges, and characterizations of Brown as insane or misguided. Even the major antislavery newspapers, such as William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* and Horace Greeley's *New-York Tribune*, did not escape Thoreau's censure. "I read all the newspapers I could get within a week after this event," Thoreau claimed in "A Plea," "and I do not remember in them a single expression of sympathy for these men" (122). In light of the extensive reporting and discussion of this raid during those first days, it is interesting—and rather surprising—to read Thoreau's claim that he did not remember even one sympathetic account of Brown within that first week. One might expect to find, at least in the Republican papers, an acknowledgment of Brown's justifiable cause for the raid if not an outright expression of sympathy. If indeed the press withheld any sympathy, as Thoreau claimed, then this silence both verifies his charge and helps justify his strong and immediate plea for Brown as a corrective to the newspapers.

This article identifies and examines the newspapers we know Thoreau read as well as those he most likely read during that week, from the day of the initial raid on Sunday, 16 October, through Saturday, 22 October, the day on which he made the claim in his journal that he read all newspaper accounts he

could get that week. While substantially confirming his claim about a general lack of sympathy for Brown, this study also analyzes what the newspapers did say that caused him to respond with such passion and intensity. It is clear from a reading of "A Plea" that Thoreau's primary purpose was not to vent anger with the newspapers, to correct their statements, to express sympathy for Brown, or to plead for him and his men. Instead, his purpose was to "plead" Brown's "cause," not to plead "for his life" (137). To be sure, most scholars generally agree that Thoreau composed and presented "A Plea" to argue in support of a transcendental Brown, his principles, and his cause—not for the real-life Brown.¹⁰ The purpose of this article, however, is not to emphasize Thoreau's larger transcendental agenda but to offer the newspaper accounts themselves as an immediate stimulus for his impassioned lecture and essay. An examination of the newspaper reports underscores the explosive context in which Thoreau composed his lecture and helps account for his heightened intellectual and emotional response as well as for the impassioned tone of his argument.

Thoreau's intense response is not unexpected when one considers his high regard for at least the idealized Brown and his low regard for newspapers. Thoreau's aversion to newspapers developed long before he read the reports of Harpers Ferry. Early in his career he complained that opinions expressed in newspapers were "shallow and flimsy,"¹¹ and he continued in the years following—in *Walden* and elsewhere—to chastise newspapers for their trivia, gossip, and general uselessness. In his journal he indicted newspapers as "pernicious," "tyrannical," "froth which ever floats on the surface of society," trifling, and crude. In "Life without Principle" he wrote that facts reported in daily newspapers "appear to float in the atmosphere, insignificant as the sporules of fungi, and impinge on some neglected *thallus*, or surface of our minds, which affords a basis for them, and hence a parasitic growth." And he concluded, "We should wash ourselves clean of such news."¹² It is not surprising, then, that he would exhort his readers of that essay to "Read not the Times. Read the Eternities."¹³ These criticisms can be attributed in large part to his dislike of politics and the political agenda of the newspapers. Nineteenth-century newspapers, particularly in the antebellum years, were dominated by biased politics.¹⁴ As one commentator explains, a virtual absence of neutrality "precluded an objective discussion of other parties or other issues"; newspapers did not try to be "all things to all people."¹⁵

In view of Thoreau's disparaging remarks about newspapers, it is not surprising that he would proclaim that he was "not a newspaper reader."¹⁶ But contrary to this claim, he did read them, referring quite regularly in his journal, correspondence, and essays to specific newspapers, articles, and reports of public events. Thoreau's acquaintance and neighbor Frank Sanborn observed that "few residents of Concord frequented the Post Office more punctually or read the newspapers (particularly the *New[-]York Tribune*) more eagerly than Thoreau."¹⁷

At the time of Harpers Ferry, as he admitted, he did indeed read every newspaper he could find. During the week after the insurrection attempt, in his 19 October journal entry and in "A Plea" itself, he identified four by name: the *Boston Journal*, *The Liberator*, the *New-York Tribune*, and the *New York Herald*. Other newspapers he likely read during that week but did not identify by name were the *Boston Courier*, Boston's *The Atlas and Daily Bee*, the *Boston Daily Traveller*, and the *Boston Evening Transcript*.¹⁸

The brunt of Thoreau's attack was directed at the Republican press, which was in varying degrees opposed to slavery. In "A Plea" he dismissed the Democratic, proslavery journals as "not human enough" (125) to warrant his indignation, and expressed his disdain for Republican editors who, "accustomed to look at every thing by the twilight of politics, express no admiration, nor true sorrow even, but call these men 'deluded fanatics.'" Those editors, he chided, "know very well on which side their bread is buttered" (123). One would not expect William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* to have been the target of such criticism, but Thoreau singled out this antislavery journal by noting that "[e]ven *The Liberator*" called the incident a "'misguided, wild, and apparently insane . . . effort'" (122). It is interesting to note the general lack of coverage of Harpers Ferry in the 21 October 1859 edition of the weekly *The Liberator*. The news of the insurrection appeared as early as Monday, 17 October, in some newspapers. Most papers reported on the incident for the first time in their Tuesday editions, with full reports appearing in the Wednesday editions. Yet *The Liberator*'s Friday edition included hardly anything about Harpers Ferry. The following week, in its 28 October edition, *The Liberator* wrote, "the *New York Journal of Commerce*, with its characteristic mendacity, says that *The Liberator*, last week, preserved an ominous silence upon the Harper's Ferry 'rebellion'!" *The Liberator* responded to this criticism and justified its lack of coverage by explaining that it had already reserved its columns for other matters, suggesting dubiously that there was not room to include a fuller account. *The Liberator* of 28 October did provide more detailed and notably sympathetic accounts of Brown than its edition a week earlier, referring to his "noble" purpose and soul. It still, nevertheless, maintained the position that the incident at Harpers Ferry was, although well intended, misguided and wild—hardly a sympathetic portrayal.

Another Republican newspaper with strong antislavery sentiments was the *New-York Tribune*, a paper edited by Thoreau's friend Horace Greeley. Thoreau himself subscribed to the weekly—but not the daily—*Tribune* in the 1850s. From 18 October through 22 October the *Tribune* published full accounts of the event, including the common dispatches, updates, excerpts from other papers, lists of participants, various interviews, letters, Brown's "Provisional Constitution," and regular editorials devoted to answering the question, "Who is Responsible?" But unlike *The Liberator*, which suggested that Brown and his wild, misguided group were to blame, the *Tribune* assigned the responsibility to those who supported proslavery attacks by the "Border-Ruffians" in Kansas. An

apparent exception to Thoreau's claim that he could find no expressions of sympathy for Brown and his men, the *Tribune* called Brown a "peaceful and quiet citizen." But the *Tribune* applied that epithet to the John Brown of "before" Harpers Ferry and his experiences in Kansas. The 21 October edition argued that Brown's suffering in Kansas and encounters with the proslavery factions "inspired" him to undertake his "wild adventure." Responding to those critics who assigned blame to the Republican party, the newspaper strenuously objected to the charge and maintained that Brown was not a Republican but an independent. From the *Tribune's* perspective, the insurrection was a "mad outbreak" whose blame should be attributed to politics and the resulting madness of Brown.

The *Boston Journal*, another Republican newspaper, published stories of the insurrection as early as Monday, 17 October. The Monday and Tuesday editions included the common Baltimore telegraph dispatches with exaggerated accounts of five hundred to seven hundred people participating in the attack. It is probable that the *Boston Journal* was the paper Thoreau referred to when he complained that a "journal which contained this pregnant news, was chiefly filled, in parallel columns, with the reports of the political conventions that were being held" (122). Both the 18 and 19 October editions included general information about the insurrection in one column, with the two adjacent columns featuring reports of political conventions. On 18 October a partial column was devoted to Harpers Ferry, and the next two columns included reports on a session of the Massachusetts legislature, journal court reports, and a report on the Sixth District Republican Convention. On 19 October, when many newspapers were devoting large sections of their pages to Harpers Ferry, the *Boston Journal* included a report entitled "Fifth Congressional District Democratic Convention and the 'Opposition Convention' at Faneuil Hall." Provoked by what struck him as evidence of shamefully misguided editorial emphasis, Thoreau exclaimed in "A Plea," "[t]o turn from the voices and deeds of earnest men to the *cackling* of political conventions!" (122).

From 17 to 22 October the *Boston Journal* expressed a general revulsion for the Harpers Ferry incident. An editorial on Wednesday, 19 October, referred to the "futile project" as one "springing from a frenzied brain," which did not deserve much attention in a newspaper's columns. Following the dispatches and the summaries of the previous days' events, the *Journal's* editorial on 20 October took the same position as the *Tribune*, denouncing Brown as a "deluded fanatic" and the insurrection as "criminal," and countering the charge, leveled by the *Boston Courier*, that the Republican newspapers were to blame for Harpers Ferry. The *Journal* condemned the raid at Harpers Ferry as well as what it called the "dreaded curse of slavery." In addition, on 21 October the *Journal* reported that the Republican press, which showed no sign of sympathy or support for Brown and the incident, actually condemned the insurrection attempt.

Another Republican journal Thoreau read during that week was Boston's *The Atlas and Daily Bee*, which distanced itself from the insurrection by calling

Brown and his raid fanatical and misguided. An editorial on 21 October sounded almost apologetic: "We deeply regret the occurrence, as we do any act which should tend to disturb and weaken the public serenity." However, on that same day and the next, *The Atlas and Daily Bee* published James Redpath's sympathetic accounts of Brown, "Reminiscences of the Insurrectionists." Redpath's reports are the sources from which Thoreau gleaned some of the biographical information used in his essay. These reports also demonstrate that Thoreau found, contrary to his claim, some expressions of sympathy for Brown in newspapers during that first week. Indeed, Thoreau included in "A Plea" an extended quotation from the 21 October *Atlas and Daily Bee* report. In that passage Redpath described Brown's camp and explained that Brown did not permit profanity nor accept people with loose morals or without principle (114). Like Redpath, Thoreau compared Brown to Cromwell to extol the character of Brown.¹⁹ But it is important to note that *The Atlas and Daily Bee* published a disclaimer on 22 October assuming "no responsibility for, nor avow[ing] any sympathy with" Redpath's opinions, which Thoreau could have interpreted as that newspaper's lack of sympathy for Brown. No doubt contributing to this interpretation, *The Atlas and Daily Bee* declared that "the mad scheme" could be attributed more to the "Democratic barbarity in Kansas" than to Republicanism. *The Atlas and Daily Bee* stated unequivocally, "For ourselves, as we have said before, we deem all such attempts as this of Brown to liberate slaves by violence, not only mischievous and wicked, but futile and stupid."

Two other newspapers Thoreau probably read at this time were the *Boston Evening Transcript* and the *Boston Daily Traveller*. On 19 October the latter called the incident "one of the maddest of all mad projects" and went on to report that "any man of common sense must have foreseen a disastrous end to such a movement," while on the same day the *Transcript* called it an "insane and villainous scheme" and described Brown as a "reckless character." The 19 October *Boston Traveller* speculated that slavery had not "anything to do with" the insurrection attempt and suggested that the abolitionists "are guiltless of any connection with the outbreak." Instead, the *Traveller* suggested, "It is a wages conflict that is going on" that led to the incident at Harpers Ferry. For its part, the *Transcript* argued on that same day, "If the South wants slavery, let them have it; but let the 'institution' be confined to that part of the Union, and never receive special national protection."

Although Thoreau said that Democratic journals "are not human enough to affect" him at all (125), he nevertheless read at least one notable Democratic paper, James Gordon Bennett's sensational and strongly proslavery *New York Herald*.²⁰ Bennett supported slavery for economic reasons and believed that an end to slavery would result in economic disaster. The *Herald* advocated letting the "seceding states go . . . and then reorganiz[ing] the Republic under the South's new constitution, leaving out the New England states."²¹ Providing a detailed,

comprehensive, but notably biased proslavery account of the incidents of Harpers Ferry, the 19 October *Herald* called Brown an "abolition madman and monomaniac." The raid, the *Herald* concluded on 20 October, was a "miserable failure." In spite of the *Herald's* strong criticism of Brown and the Harpers Ferry incident, and notwithstanding Thoreau's own statement that Democratic newspapers did not affect him at all, Thoreau read the *Herald* and referred to many of its lines and stories. At one point in "A Plea" he mentioned the *Herald* by name and angrily observed, "And the New York *Herald* reports the conversation [i.e., between Brown and his interrogators] '*verbatim*'! It does not know of what undying words it is made the vehicle" (127). Brown's comments cited at the end of Thoreau's essay are, in fact, taken directly from the *Herald's* report on the interview of Brown by Senator Mason, Congressman Vallandigham of Ohio, and others. It is interesting to note how favorably the *Herald* reporter described Brown and recorded his testimony. For example, Brown was described as "affable," and quite a few detailed lines of his testimony portrayed Brown as an honest and sincere individual.

Another proslavery Democratic paper Thoreau read and referred to on occasion was the *Boston Courier*, characterized by Frank Luther Mott as the most "lively and literary" of the Boston newspapers.²² During the week of Harpers Ferry, the *Courier* leveled a charge against the Republican presses and the "hypocritical philanthropists who do no murder, only point the way" (19 October 1859). According to the *Courier*, the "'Browns' of the day have received much encouragement from these presses." This Northern newspaper presented the most vehement attack on the Republican papers, condemning what it viewed as self-serving attempts to escape blame by suggesting that Brown was insane. On Saturday, 22 October, the *Courier* suggested that this tactic "is a monstrous sham . . . which the Republican presses are trying to force down the throats of their friends to pour into the ears of the people at large. It is a monster and an abortion." The editorial pointed out that these same newspapers supported Brown's trips and speeches around the North only months before Harpers Ferry. It also termed "flimsy and desperate" their attempts to depict Brown as insane after the Harpers Ferry raid. The *Courier* also complained, "Nothing but the necessity of self-preservation can excuse these politicians and editors for their cowardly and ungrateful act in now flinging him overboard" (22 October 1859).

As these and many similar remarks indicate, the Republican and Democratic papers did not pull any punches in their attacks upon one another. Moreover, the issue of slavery seemed to have been largely lost or ignored, as Thoreau himself observed, in favor of partisan politics and personal attacks. *The Liberator* called the *Journal of Commerce's* charges "hypocritical villainy"; the *New-York Tribune* called the *Journal of Commerce* "impudent and unscrupulous"; and the *Boston Journal* referred to the *Courier's* reporting as political "imbecility" as well as terming it "demented" and "supercilious."²³ In an editorial on 21 October, *The*

Atlas and Daily Bee said of all those critics who blamed the Republicans: "Every toothless crone among them is out of doors flaunting her apron and chattering to the four winds of heaven." It is no wonder that Thoreau felt compelled to "correct the tone and statements of the papers" and express sympathy for John Brown and especially his cause. For Thoreau the presses were guilty of slander against a superior man dedicated in action and thought to the elimination of slavery. The perceived misrepresentation of Brown, his principles, and his mission motivated Thoreau to write feverishly in his journal, countering and condemning the press.

An examination of the newspaper reports he read during that first week largely confirms Thoreau's claim that he found not one expression of sympathy for Brown and his men. Both the Republican and Democratic newspapers were critical of Brown and the insurrection attempt. There were a few exceptions, but even they do not necessarily contradict Thoreau's general observation about a lack of sympathy. As was noted with Redpath's sympathetic accounts of Brown in the reports published in *The Atlas and Daily Bee*, the newspaper itself made it clear that it held "no sympathy with the opinions expressed" in the reports, which Thoreau most likely saw as a repudiation of Redpath's sentiments and an avowed lack of sympathy for Brown and his cause. Clearly also, the *Tribune's* reference to Brown as a "quiet and peaceful citizen" pointed to the Brown before, not after, Harpers Ferry. And certainly any sympathy apparent in *The Liberator's* temperate reference to Brown's "well-meant effort" was no doubt overshadowed for Thoreau by that paper's lack of coverage of the event or any other sympathetic mention of Brown on Friday, 21 October—a day on which other newspapers included elaborate and detailed accounts of Harpers Ferry. In view of these moderate exceptions and the preponderance of harsh commentary in the newspapers during this first week, one can understand why Thoreau would make such a claim. What Thoreau observed was that the newspapers were so embroiled in their own rhetorical exchanges and charges that they essentially neglected considering Brown's cause. Amidst the name calling, exaggeration, distortions, and erroneous arguments that filled the columns of the reports, there was not, as he noted, any significant support for Brown or any meaningful attempt to justify his actions as a response to the inhumanity of slavery.

In his reading Thoreau encountered some antislavery newspapers that provided little coverage and essentially ignored the news of the insurrection and others that provided detailed coverage but blamed proslavery factions in Kansas for what they derided as Brown's "wild" adventure. The proslavery papers, as Thoreau no doubt expected, considered Brown a maniac and leveled various charges against the Republican press. Some accounts, such as those in the *Boston Courier*, blamed the Republicans; others, among them the *Boston Journal's*, countered charges the Republicans were to blame. Still other sources, critical of Brown and essentially ignoring the issue of slavery, expressed their interest in maintaining the status quo and public serenity. While the newspapers collectively

expressed proslavery and antislavery sentiments, all of the accounts Thoreau read during that first week after Harper's Ferry conceded that Brown's insurrection attempt could not help resolve the slavery issue. Even a week later, in its 28 October edition, *The Liberator* admitted that the slaves were so downtrodden that no insurrection would avail.

The anger, fear, and confusion brought on by the raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry are reflected in the newspaper reports. The prospect of a major conflict and civil war weighed heavily on the journalists and their readers. After considering the hostile reaction and defensiveness in newspaper reports, Thoreau felt compelled to do something immediately to indict the press and correct misstatements. By so doing, he drew attention to Brown's moral purpose and to the essential issue of the enslavement of four million people—points that seemed lost in the newspapers themselves.

Notes

- 1 *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, 14 vols. bound as 2 (1906; reprint, New York: Dover, 1962), 12: 400-39.
- 2 Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 416.
- 3 Some accounts indicate that the lecture was delivered at the Town Hall, but according to a recent study the lecture was delivered in the First Parish vestry. See Bradley P. Dean and Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Thoreau's Lectures After *Walden*: An Annotated Calendar," in *Studies in the American Renaissance*, ed. Joel Myerson (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1996), 312.
- 4 Henry Seidel Canby, *Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 390, and Harding, *Days*, 417.
- 5 Dean and Hoag, "Thoreau's Lectures After *Walden*," 318.
- 6 With the exception of a few abridged versions of Thoreau's lecture published in the newspapers, the essay published in Redpath's anthology was the first published version of "A Plea." The second authorized version of the essay appeared in *A Yankee in Canada, with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers*, published posthumously in 1866. See Wendell Glick, "Textual Introduction: 'A Plea for Captain John Brown,'" in Henry David Thoreau, *Reform Papers*, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), 341.
- 7 Harding, *Days*, 417.
- 8 Canby, *Thoreau*, 392.
- 9 Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," in *Reform Papers*, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), 111. (Subsequent references are to this edition and will be documented parenthetically in the text.)
- 10 Commentary on "A Plea" has focused primarily on Thoreau's purpose, whether that was to defend Brown's act or simply his transcendental principles. Gilman Ostrander, while suggesting that Thoreau had a limited understanding of the real Brown, argues

that he intended to create a transcendental Brown; see "Emerson, Thoreau, and John Brown," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 34 (March 1953): 713-26. Walter Harding generally agrees with this interpretation and notes that Thoreau was "more attracted by Brown's ideal than by his actions, by his courage than by his deeds. He pleaded not for Brown's life, but for his character" (*Days*, 418). Similarly, Michael Meyer concludes that "Thoreau's transcendental perception clearly informs his celebration of Brown as a type, an ideal, and principle"; see "Thoreau's Rescue of John Brown from History," in *Studies in the American Renaissance*, ed. Joel Myerson (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 311-12. Robert Albrecht maintains that Thoreau's "A Plea" is designed rather to convince his audience of the "righteousness of John Brown's principles and the act proceeding from those principles"; see "Thoreau and His Audience: 'A Plea for Captain John Brown,'" *American Literature* 32 (1961): 393. In his "An Eccentric Kinship: Henry David Thoreau's 'A Plea for Captain John Brown,'" Herbert L. Carson indicates that Thoreau's essay is a "compassioned attempt to justify Brown's act"; see *Southern Speech Journal* 27 (Winter 1961): 152. Henry S. Canby argues that Thoreau's essay was not an attempt to save Brown's life or even to attack slavery, but to argue in defense of "violence in a good cause"; see *Thoreau*, 391. At least one scholar suggests that Thoreau's purpose was to express his high regard for Brown. Len Gougeon concludes that Thoreau's lecture on 30 October "expresses his unqualified admiration for Brown"; see "Thoreau and Reform" in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 207.

- 11 Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde, William L. Howarth, and Elizabeth Hall Witherell (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), 185.
- 12 Henry David Thoreau, "Life without Principle," in *Reform Papers*, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), 170.
- 13 "Life without Principle," 173.
- 14 See Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).
- 15 Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 25, 29.
- 16 Henry David Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), 101.
- 17 See the introduction by F. B. Sanborn in Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 2 vols. (Boston: The Bibliophile Society, 1909), 1:49n.
- 18 Although he does not cite these newspapers explicitly during this period, he had mentioned each previously in either his journal or correspondence. The *Courier*, *Atlas and Daily Bee*, and *Transcript* had also previously advertised or reviewed his work. There are a number of papers that Thoreau does not mention but might have read because of their politics or their sizable circulation. The *New-York Times*, for example, was a major eastern newspaper with Republican biases. Another influential paper he does not refer to was New York's *The Evening Post*, edited by the poet and liberal William Cullen Bryant. Having connections with Bryant and sympathies for the newspaper's politics, Thoreau might very well have read it at this time, although he doesn't mention it directly.

- 19 *The Liberator* published selections from Redpath's "Reminiscences of the Insurrectionists" in its 28 October 1859 edition. Thoreau's initial citations of Redpath's reports, however, were recorded in his 22 October journal entry, which suggests that the source for this information was *The Atlas and Daily Bee*.
- 20 The *New York Herald* recorded the largest circulation of the major New York newspapers, with an average in the 1850s of fifty-eight thousand (compared to *The New-York Times*'s forty-two thousand and the *New-York Tribune*'s twenty-nine thousand). See Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, 49.
- 21 John Tebbel, *The Compact History of the American Newspaper* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1969), 111.
- 22 Mott, *American Journalism*, 187.
- 23 *Liberator*, 28 October; *Tribune*, 21 October; *Boston Journal*, 20-21 October.



Hercules and Antaeus (1470s)
by Antonio del Pollaiuolo

Uncaptured Monsters: The Ostracizing Allusions of Walden

Sharlene Roeder

"I could never see that these men slew or captured any monster or finished any labor," Thoreau writes of his neighbors. Struggling, failing—ignorant—"[t]hey have no friend Iolas,"¹ no epic hero or benevolent divine to assist and enlighten them. So Thoreau descends into the hell of Concord, donning the cloaks of classical saviors—Achilles, Aeneas, Ulysses, and more tellingly, Oedipus and Orpheus. However, his power comes not from the apotheosis of these analogies, but from the contiguous degradation of those he allegedly seeks to save. He is the hero, but we, his audience, are the inanimate objects, ignoble insects, and marauding monsters of Greek lore. Deifying himself, degrading his flock, Thoreau taunts with talk of salvation. Rather than teaching us the tenets of transcendentalism, *Walden's* classical allusions betray the author's belief that we cannot ascend as high as he.

Strolling Concord, walking Ktaadn, or riding the Penobscot, Thoreau sees, or makes us see, figures of classical Greece. As critics from Ethel Seybold on have agreed, "anyone who has read *Walden* will be aware that he valued the classics most" of all his readings.² Greek mythology, Robert D. Richardson observes, is the "only mythology that Thoreau used so extensively in *Walden* that we may conclude that he was relying on it, and in some ways grounding his book on it,"³ though he adds that no single myth dominates any of Thoreau's texts; he is not constantly Achilles, nor always Apollo. Rather than a figure or a form, Thoreau employs what Richardson calls "the *process* of myth, the process by which myth universalizes and generalizes personal or individual experience, giving it general significance and narrative shape."⁴ But beyond simply extending his experience to his readers, Thoreau uses classical allusions in *Walden* to define himself and humanity, specifically supporting his prophetic purpose. This definition is unique to *Walden*. Although many of the same Greek figures appear in Thoreau's other writings from the same time frame, mythological allusions in A

Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, "Ktaadn," *Cape Cod*, and "Chesuncook" tend to elevate society.

Thoreau himself argues the importance and didactic nature of his allusions in *Walden*. Citing the ancient texts as "the noblest recorded thoughts of man," he recommends the classics for teaching the young: "The student may read Homer and Aeschylus in the Greek without danger of dissipation or luxuriousness, for it implies that he in some measure emulate their heroes" (100). Thoreau's invitation to emulate the heroes is reinforced as he repeatedly compares himself to the epic warriors in the course of teaching others how to live as he has. But his example is futile, if, as he states, these "heroic books . . . will always be in a language dead to degenerate times" (100).

Yet a "simple and natural" man's mere appreciation of the poet makes him a "true Homeric" figure, as in the rare example of the wood chopper, Alex Therien. "He, too, has heard of Homer," Thoreau reports, but adds later, "though what his writing was about he did not know." Not only has Therien "heard of Homer," but "he holds the book"—the *Iliad*—which Thoreau "must translate to him" (*Walden*, 144-45). Even though Thoreau accuses the Canadian of failing to understand Homer, by unwittingly following Thoreau's teachings, accepting his words—in advice and translation—this visitor to the pond ascends metaphorically higher than any resident of Concord and can sit beside his translator.

Following Thoreau in any manner wins brief epic praise, as with the Irish ice-cutters—"a hundred men of Hyperborean extraction" (*Walden*, 294). The men of the original myth live in an icy utopia. Without war or work, they dwell forever with a Muse, delighting their god Apollo with their large sacrifices, as Perseus witnesses.⁵ Thoreau's Hyperboreans win their metaphor from both the cold and their worship. Partaking of the pond in a more literal manner than Thoreau, these men make a Valhalla, a banquet hall for heroes of another myth cycle.

Yet these epic men do not survive long. Though this allusion may seem positive, Thoreau sends one to hell "through a crack in the ground down toward Tartarus." Misstepping at his pond, these workers devolve from mythic men to dying beasts: "he who was so brave before suddenly became but the ninth part of a man, almost gave up his animal heat, and was glad to take refuge in my house, and acknowledged that there was some virtue in a stove" (*Walden*, 295). Losing most of their humanity and nearly losing their "animal heat," they are driven to Thoreau in "refuge" and "acknowledge" the "virtue" of his hearth. Like Therien, they are unwitting followers and unintentionally earn their brief mythic status.

But as critics often note, *Walden* follows Thoreau's journey toward enlightenment. Seeking wisdom in nature, Thoreau begins his apotheosis in quest of divine light, praying at the hearths of the fire gods: "An old forest fence which had seen its best days was a great haul for me. I sacrificed it to Vulcan, for it was past serving the god Terminus" (249). Figuratively transcending the limits made

by men, Thoreau rejects Terminus, the god of boundaries, to sacrifice a fence to Vulcan, the most appropriate deity for Thoreau's offerings. As a god of fire, Vulcan represents enlightenment, but he is also a god of the earth. Hurlled from heaven for censuring Zeus, he resides underground as the craftsman of the gods. Vulcan thus represents not only knowledge and nature, but truth and creativity as well. Thoreau continues to pursue divine light in celebrating the dawn and its goddess, proclaiming himself both "a worshipper of Aurora" (88) and her son. Stating, that "[a]ll poets and heroes . . . are the children of Aurora" (89), Thoreau wins his divinity on two counts, that of writer and warrior, since he compares himself to the ancient heroes.

As in this allusion to Aurora, Thoreau never openly takes the name of a god, but he takes on their roles and powers. Seeking to save the earth, or at least Hollowell Place, Thoreau is "ready to carry it on; like Atlas, to take the world on [his] shoulders"—though he adds, he "never heard what compensation he received for that" (83). Yet Atlas's service is punishment, meriting no compensation. Whereas other Titans are imprisoned in Tartarus having lost the war with the Olympians, as one of their leaders, Atlas is "condemned to bear up the heavens on his shoulders."⁶ When temporarily relieved of the burden by Hercules in exchange for fetching the apples of the Hesperides, Atlas has to be tricked into taking it back. So the epithet, while supporting Thoreau's role as savior, also laments it.

Similarly, when he writes of the strength he draws from his beans, he compares himself to another defeated warrior: "They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus" (*Walden*, 155). A giant born from Earth, Antaeus draws his strength from his mother. So long as he touches her, he is invincible. But his strength proves to be his weakness when Hercules lifts him off the ground and squeezes him to death. So Thoreau metaphorically acknowledges a vulnerability and a mortality.

This allusion, like the one to Atlas, effectively reflects the symbiotic relationship between Thoreau and nature, a connection inherent in transcendentalism. As Atlas, Thoreau supports the earth; as Antaeus, he draws strength from it. Yet the later allusion embodies his self-defeatism as well. As Antaeus, Thoreau is at odds with himself, since he calls his hoeing of the beans a "small Herculean labor" (*Walden*, 155). In the same paragraph, he is thus both the victor and the vanquished. In its context in *Walden*, however, this juxtaposition of warring figures is appropriate. Thoreau *is* at war with himself. His stated purpose conflicts with his actual message: he intends to teach us, but we are incapable of learning.

Significantly, these allusions describe only Thoreau's own efforts. Less pilgrim than prophet, he does not represent humanity. Although Thoreau contends, "If I seem to boast more than is becoming, my excuse is that I brag for humanity rather than for myself" (*Walden*, 49), as Stephen Railton observes, "this

generosity is complicated by the way throughout the opening chapters he keeps defining his 'I' in opposition to 'many,' or 'most men,' or 'the mass of men.'"⁷ Yet it is as the mass that we are first defined in *Walden*, as Railton also notes: "By his third paragraph Thoreau conclusively identifies his reader, 'you who read these pages,' with his townsmen, 'my neighbors.'"⁸ So Thoreau describes our "outward condition or circumstances in this world" (*Walden*, 4), as he ascends above us. Railton correctly remarks that "[w]here his indictment of our delusions is razor-sharp, his references to himself tend to retreat into mystifications like baskets, bay horses, and turtle doves."⁹ Similarly, he retreats to Olympus in his classical allusions.

Isolated in these allusions, Thoreau lives alone with the gods. Of the pond beside his home, he wonders "what nymphs presided over it in the Golden Age" (*Walden*, 179). He compares it to the Castalian Fountain, one of the springs of Parnassus, sacred to Apollo, another god of light and reason. His cabin is also "fit to entertain a travelling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments" (*Walden*, 85). His home in nature is the dwelling of the Greek deities, since "Olympus is but the outside of the earth every where" (*Walden*, 85).

When Thoreau does step down from Olympus, it is as a hero, usually a leader, often one of divine lineage: "Many a lusty crest-waving Hector, that towered a whole foot above his crowding comrades, fell before my weapon and rolled in the dust" (*Walden*, 162). Saving his beans from the "lusty crest-waving" weed Hector, he is invincible Achilles. Similarly, neighbor Seeley's "spectator-dom" makes the deconstruction of the shanty "one with the removal of the gods of Troy" (*Walden*, 44). By extension, Thoreau becomes one with pious Aeneas.

Seeing sirens in appearance and sphinxes in ignorance, Thoreau exhorts us to live as he does, defying the world: "Let us not be upset and overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner, situated in the meridian shallows. Weather this danger and you are safe. . . . With unrelaxed nerves, with morning vigor, sail by it, looking another way, tied to the mast like Ulysses" (*Walden*, 97). Thoreau recalls the hero's ten-year voyage home after the Trojan War and his perilous pass near two notorious monsters. His dinner is Charybdis, who consumes the sea of the straights three times a day and spews it forth again. Yet his advice here is for escaping the Sirens, "whose isle shone afar off white with the bones of unburied men," he notes in *A Week*.¹⁰ The songs of these creatures madden men to pitch themselves against the rocks. Only Ulysses hears the song and escapes, "tied to the mast" as he is, at the advice of his lover, the sorceress Circe. The daughter of the Sun, she is best known for turning Ulysses's men into swine. So she seems a close kin of Thoreau. The source of the same advice and similar spells, he is our treacherous lover, both assisting and assaulting us.

Echoing the dictate of the Delphic oracle, Thoreau further implores us to imitate ill-fated Oedipus: "If you would learn to speak all tongues and conform to the customs of all nations, if you would travel farther than all travellers, be

naturalized in all climes, and cause the Sphinx to dash her head against a stone, even obey the precept of the old philosopher, and Explore thyself" (*Walden*, 322). Indicative of his probing intelligence, Oedipus solves the riddle of the Sphinx, driving the monster to suicide. Yet Oedipus is a tragic hero, better known for his ignorance and the resulting incest. As myopic as the self-blinded king of Thebes, Thoreau never pursues this last allusion to note that Oedipus is as destructive to the town as the Sphinx from which he liberated it—and as doomed.

In traveling the darkness of the village, though, Thoreau is not Oedipus, but Orpheus. He is not leading a town but fleeing a hell, as he quotes Apollonius of Rhodes, "'loudly singing the praises of the gods to his lyre, drown[ing] the voices of the Sirens, and [keeping] out of danger'" (*Walden*, 169). Around him the town seems to court its own infernal existence. The farmer "sacrifices not to Ceres and the Terrestrial Jove, but to the infernal Plutus rather" (*Walden*, 165). Making no offerings to the goddess of harvests or the god of gods, but to Plutus, the god of wealth, the people sell off earth and heaven.

Although his claims often seem mock-heroic, designed to cast his efforts as the antithesis of the heroes', his allusions to the townspeople more often mock them as monsters. Whereas Thoreau is consistently figured as divine, his neighbors are portrayed as not even human. They are incapable of heroic acts in a world in which weeds wear the names of warriors. As Thoreau walks their streets, he turns these idle men to stone maidens: "I hardly ever failed, when I rambled through the village, to see a row of such worthies, either sitting on a ladder sunning themselves . . . or else leaning against a barn with their hands in their pockets, like caryatides, as if to prop it up" (*Walden*, 168). Supporting stables, not temples, these men are made into the effeminate pillars of Greek porticos.

By comparing the men to inert women, Thoreau's attack is two pronged, as when he strips the farmer Flint of both humanity and masculinity in a single simile. For ravaging the land on which he imposed his name, Flint is given "fingers grown into crooked and horny talons from the long habit of grasping harpy-like" (*Walden*, 195). He is allied to the half-women, half-bird beasts who assault the Argonauts and Aeneas and defile everything they touch. Since all Thoreau's monsters are female, society is both ostracized and emasculated in these economic epithets.

But Thoreau's attack transcends Concord. He recalls two Greek genesis stories in order to remind us of our lowly origins: "It is said that Deucalion and Pyrrha created men by throwing stones over their heads behind them. . . . So much for blind obedience to a blundering oracle, throwing stones over their heads behind them, and not seeing where they fell" (*Walden*, 5-6). He laments the "blind obedience" of the couple, who sought to restore the human race after the Greek Deluge. Following Themis's riddled command, they cast their ancestor's bones—earth's stones—over their shoulders, making men and women, and as Thoreau adds with a Biblical twist, "not seeing where they fell." Thoreau cites this myth to

support his claim that "men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon ploughed into the soil for compost" (*Walden*, 5), implying the futility of resurrecting us at all.

But humanity falls farther under Thoreau's hand. He rails against our lives, how "we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men" (*Walden*, 91). As he explains in *A Week*, "According to fable, when the island of Aegina was depopulated by sickness, at the instance of Aeacus, Jupiter turned the ants into men." Interprets Thoreau, "that is, as some think, he made men of the inhabitants who lived meanly like ants" (58). In *Walden*, he questions if Zeus makes much improvement when he raises Aeacus's Myrmidons.

Thoreau again summons this allusion in describing the war of his woodpile. Inverting the same fable, he elevates nature to degrade humanity. He returns the virtues of Homer's Myrmidons to the ants, seeing a diminutive "Achilles, who had nourished his wrath apart, and had now come to avenge or rescue his Patroclus" (*Walden*, 229). These insects wage a war that belittles in both size and provocation not only the famous battle fought in Concord, but all other battles waged "in the history of America" (*Walden*, 230). Thoreau chides Concord for its two casualties of 1775 and its economic motivations. Of the ants he writes, "There was not one hireling there. . . . it was a principle they fought for . . . not to avoid a three penny tax on their tea" (*Walden*, 230).

Rarely do Thoreau's neighbors surmount the degrading epithets and dehumanizing analogies, and then only in a tenuous relationship to the divine: "I fear that we are such gods or demigods only as fauns and satyrs, the divine allied to beasts, the creatures of appetite, and that, to some extent, our very life is our disgrace" (*Walden*, 220). Here, as Thoreau elevates humanity to its highest mythical standing in *Walden*, he condescends to join us. This is one of the few allusions in which he employs the first person plural pronoun. Although allegedly encouraged by the presumably "unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life" (*Walden*, 90), Thoreau is "no friend Iolas." Bearing the light of knowledge from the heavens in his devotion to the earth, he only meets us halfway, descending to join us in the woods on cloven hooves.

Yet only in *Walden* do these allusions leave us so unenlightened. In *A Week*, as Stephen Adams and Donald Ross note, myth is "a way of discovering (or creating) significance in events from years ago, as Thoreau 're-vises' (sees again in a new light) his experience for meanings it did not at first reveal."¹¹ In this earlier work, this new light shines on humanity, as Thoreau promises us "greater men than Homer" (*A Week*, 8). Over three hundred allusions and seventy-three classical characters bring us into "the dazzling halls of Aurora, into which poets have had but a partial glance over the eastern hills,—drifting amid the saffron-colored clouds, and playing with the rosy fingers of the Dawn, in the very path of the Sun's chariot" (*A Week*, 189).

Although seemingly excessive and superficial, Thoreau's use of allusion is conscientious and applied largely in his later revision in response to a newfound purpose. Adams and Ross note, "In revising the *Week*, he increases the number of classical allusions, but he also reveals a new seriousness toward myth through theoretical statements and by introducing his own invented myths."¹² *A Week* becomes Thoreau's "own quest myth, his search for a goal that he identified as God and heaven."¹³ The uplifting though ornate classical allusions help redirect a simple travel log into this archetypal journey. Thoreau employs some of the same classical imagery of *Walden* differently in *A Week*, since this is a work of personal exploration, not one of prophetic explanation.

However, his plan for *Walden* is alluded to in his theoretical statements in *A Week*. Thoreau repeatedly justifies using myth in his narratives, insisting that "[s]o far from being false or fabulous in the common sense, it contains only enduring and essential truth" (*A Week*, 60). He goes even further to stress the veracity inherent in the most fantastic stories:

The fable which is naturally and truly composed, so as to satisfy the imagination, ere it addresses the understanding, beautiful though strange as a wild flower, is to the wise man an apothegm, and admits of his most generous interpretation. When we read that Bacchus made the Tyrrhenian mariners mad, so that they leapt into the sea, mistaking it for a meadow full of flowers, and so became dolphins, we are not concerned about the historical truth of this, but rather a higher poetical truth. (*A Week*, 58)

The same can be said for Thoreau's *Walden* creations. His metamorphoses are metaphorical of his "higher poetical truth." In *A Week*, he acknowledges but does not yet exploit the malleability of myths, "the readiness with which they may be made to express a variety of truths" (61). However, in *Walden* his allusions express the alleged truths of our weakness and his strength. In what Richardson calls a process of myth-linking, "a sort of dialectic that proceeds from fact to myth, and thence on to a greater fact,"¹⁴ Thoreau employs his classical imagery to remake, not simply wake, his neighbors, and by extension his readers. The "saffron-colored clouds" are culled and "the rosy fingers of the Dawn" curbed, his prose imbedded with fewer flowers than thorns. His use of allusion, like his purpose, is concentrated, controlled and didactic. We feel what he confesses to H.G.O. Blake about his neighbors just before sending the manuscript to the publisher: "Their humanity affects me as simply monstrous."¹⁵

Yet in another contemporary piece, "Ktaadn," Thoreau rides the rapids of the Penobscot with George McCauslin and Thomas Fowler "with a hundred as narrow escapes as ever the Argo had in passing through the Symplegades."¹⁶ His words recall Jason and the Argonauts' passage between the Clashing Islands. As Richardson observes, "This technique of dignifying the local and parochial by

means of epic association—which sets the stage for heroic association—puts the reader on notice that, since Thoreau's river is made out to be the equal of the great and famous rivers, we may expect its hero to be placed in the company of great and famous heroes."¹⁷

Significantly, Thoreau celebrates not only himself on the river, but his companions as well. Only in walking on Ktaadn, which is "like a short highway, where a demi-god might be let down to take a turn or two in an afternoon, to settle his dinner" (*Maine Woods*, 45), does he again ascend alone. Here he is reminded of "the creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus. Such was Caucasus and the rock where Prometheus was bound. Aeschylus had no doubt visited such scenery as this. It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits" (*Maine Woods*, 64). Thoreau is less the poet Aeschylus, walking in his footsteps, than his subject, the tortured Titan Prometheus, bound at Caucasus by Zeus for bringing light to mankind: "Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends" (*Maine Woods*, 64). Though utilizing the third person pronoun, Thoreau is the beholder; he loses "some vital part . . . through the loose grating of his ribs," as Prometheus loses his liver to the vultures. Like Atlas and Antaeus in *Walden*, Prometheus represents a defeated divinity, one weary of his burden. Here, as in *Walden*, we are incapable of ascending as high as Thoreau, unable to imagine his solitude: "He is more lone than you can imagine" (*Maine Woods*, 64).

Although this passage prepares us for our abandonment in *Walden*, most of the classical references in "Ktaadn" are scattered across distant pages, mounting little cumulative effect. Moreover, because these allusions are not directed to a didactic end, they lead critics to see the mountain more than the man. Citing the changing, jewel-like trout, which lead Thoreau to "understand better . . . the truth of mythology, the fables of Proteus, and all those beautiful sea-monsters" (*Maine Woods*, 54), Richardson sees Thoreau using myth to express "not history or biography but nature itself."¹⁸ The allusions of "Ktaadn" are much more subtle than those of *Walden* and do not collectively disparage humanity.

Similarly, in *Cape Cod* Thoreau never mounts much of an epic assault, leaving allusions unexplored as simple adornment. For example, the Greek sea gods are invoked in an analysis of algae, "a singularly marine and fabulous product, a fit invention for Neptune to adorn his car with, or a freak of Proteus."¹⁹ In much the same way, Thoreau's classical citations in *Cape Cod*, reproduced in Greek, function as acoustics, as Thoreau himself concedes: "I put in a little Greek now and then, partly because it sounds so much like the ocean" (*Cape Cod*, 51).

And the shore, like its seaweed, is celebrated more than the people. Cape Cod itself is taunted by breakers that look "like droves of a thousand wild horses of Neptune" (45). This shore needs a lighthouse keeper with "more eyes than Argus" (135), the hundred-eyed monster. Yet the inhabitants, whose "ordinary trips would cast the Argonautic expedition into the shade" (110), go without

many other epithets. Adams and Ross's search for "a significant mythical figure" in *Cape Cod* is disappointing, leading only to the Wellfleet oyster man, a "sober Silenus" (71). This satyr and tutor, unlike the one of *Walden*, "never approaches the spiritual status . . . of Alex Therein [sic] in *Walden*."²⁰ Citing Thoreau's encounter with the "voracious beach" that "[t]he ancients would have represented . . . as a sea monster with open jaws, more terrible than Scylla and Charybdis" (*Cape Cod*, 195), they justly conclude that "the reference only emphasizes the absence of serious mythology in this modern book."²¹

However, this absence is not surprising. As in *Walden*, Thoreau's purpose shapes his allusions. Primarily a travel book, *Cape Cod* was not intended to elevate or awaken in the manner of *Walden*. As critics note, "it differs from *Walden* mainly because Thoreau intended it as a conventional and popular travel book, albeit more challenging and sophisticated than most."²²

Another contemporary Thoreauvian travel piece, *A Yankee in Canada* is nearly bereft of classical allusion. Though haunting the landscapes of *A Week*, "Ktaadn," and *Cape Cod*, the Greeks, "with all their wood and river gods," are silenced among the French Canadians, who are judged "not so qualified to name the natural features of a country."²³ Only Thebes is cited in a comparison with Quebec and then only to ridicule the latter: "if seven champions were enough against [Thebes], one would be enough against Quebec, though he bore for all armor and device only an umbrella and a bundle."²⁴ This lack of allusion betrays an inconsistency in Thoreau's use of classical allusion throughout his works, suggesting a conscious manipulation of these references.

When Thoreau does elect to evoke epic imagery outside of *Walden*, he is more apt to elevate than denigrate men, though sometimes seeming only to celebrate himself in effigy. In the later "Chesuncook," for example, his sparse yet strained classical references surround Ansell Smith. A "pioneer" making his home in the woods, Smith is akin to Thoreau's *Walden* persona, deified by subtle allusion. His harbor is "such a one . . . as the Argo might have been launched in," while the walls of his home are "successive bulging cheeks gradually lessening upwards and tuned to each other with the axe, like Pandean pipes." So the man might be the hero Jason or the satyr Pan. Thoreau adds about the walls, "Probably the musical forest-gods had not yet cast them aside" (*Maine Woods*, 124-25). as indeed Smith had not.

Nearby, the man's blacksmith shop reminds Thoreau "how primitive and honorable a trade was Vulcan's." Having never heard of "any carpenter or tailor among the gods," Thoreau suggests that such iron-workers as Smith and Vulcan "preceded these and every other mechanic at Chesuncook as well as on Olympus" (*Maine Woods*, 126). Linking the pioneers' land with that of the Greek divinities, Thoreau has "no doubt that they lived pretty much the same sort of life in the Homeric age. . . . In the days of Achilles, even, they delighted in big barns, and perchance in pressed hay, and he who possessed the most valuable team was the

best fellow" (*Maine Woods*, 128). Though neither similes nor epithets, these allusions make Ansell Smith's world epic.

The only other mythological allusions in "Chesuncook" can be applied more directly to Thoreau, reminiscent of his carefully crafted ascension in *Walden*. Thoreau wonders if Smith, like Admetus, the king who won the poet-god Apollo as his herdsman, "has yet got a poet to look after the cattle," but suggests this position to someone who "love[s] to write verses and go a-gunning" (*Maine Woods*, 129), implicitly refusing the position for himself with the latter qualification. As Seybold notes of Thoreau's journal, "The story of Apollo and Admetus was his favorite; he referred to it innumerable times; it illustrated his own tragedy in being forced to serve the god of business."²⁵

Although usually seen as the god of light, reason, medicine and prophecy, Apollo is also an archer, easily insulted and quick to curse. *The Iliad* opens on a plague brought by Apollo when the Greeks would not heed his priest, Chryses. Similarly, Thoreau takes aim at us in *Walden*. Feeling himself degraded by the demands of society, Thoreau taunts us with his own enlightenment when he appoints himself our prophet. Perhaps perceiving himself as persecuted—his own cursed Cassandra, doomed never to be believed by so materialistic a culture—Thoreau offers us our salvation only to set it just beyond our reach.

Sherman Paul aptly calls *Walden* a "fable of renewal," while Richardson appropriately subtitles it "Metamorphoses in Concord."²⁶ Both apply. Whether author or persona, sincere or ironic, Thoreau achieves the same effect. Although expounding the tenets of transcendentalism, Thoreau, in his artfully marshaled allusions, attempts to exclude humanity from the divine he preaches we seek. A monster himself, less Chanticleer than Circe, he curses, not crows—and his aid comes at a high cost, the loss of our humanity.

Yet, as if *Walden* were another travel book—as though the way were the same as in *A Week*, *The Maine Woods*, or *Cape Cod*—we struggle to navigate in Thoreau's wake on a journey he deems us incapable of taking. We follow this scornful prophet despite his warning of our failure—our hope also inherent in his allusions. For though Thoreau ascends above us, he climbs only as high as Olympus. He chooses no ethereal, omnipotent beings among which to escape us, but the most human and vulnerable of pantheons, where the greatest of gods fall to their heirs. Including himself among the contentious brood of Zeus, Thoreau may try to deny us our place there, but no god in that court wins every battle.

Inherent in the conception of Thoreau's chosen universe is an affinity between mortal and god. In Greek statuary, *kouros* figures—nudes of athletes and warriors—were mistakenly called "Apollons" since later centuries could not differentiate man from god. Even in making us monsters, Thoreau raises us closer to him, since classical beasts like the Harpies, Scylla and Charybdis are all divinely sired.

Whether intended or not, Thoreau's metaphorical rejection of his audience invites our pursuit of him. We defy him to follow him, yet follow him in

defying him. Embracing tenets we are told we cannot hold, we deny his divine authority, just as the Greek gods did before us, dethroning their fathers. We wage a war with the Titan Thoreau, taking from him what he sought in his allusions: transcendence.

Notes

- 1 Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), 4. (Subsequent references to *Walden* will be documented parenthetically in the text.)
- 2 Ethel Seybold, *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1951), 10.
- 3 Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), 128.
- 4 Richardson, *Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance*, 117.
- 5 Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (New York: Longman, 1985), 372.
- 6 Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 5.
- 7 Stephen Railton, *Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 52.
- 8 Railton, *Authorship and Audience*, 51.
- 9 Railton, *Authorship and Audience*, 66.
- 10 Henry D. Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde et al (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), 58-59. (Subsequent references to *A Week* will be documented parenthetically in the text.)
- 11 Stephen Adams and Donald Ross, Jr., *Revising Mythologies: The Composition of Thoreau's Major Works* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1988), 8.
- 12 Adams and Ross, *Revising Mythologies*, 78.
- 13 Adams and Ross, *Revising Mythologies*, 77.
- 14 Richardson, *Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance*, 135.
- 15 Railton, *Authorship and Audience*, 55.
- 16 Henry D. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), 32. (Subsequent references to *The Maine Woods* will be documented parenthetically in the text.)
- 17 Richardson, *Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance*, 92.
- 18 Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 231.
- 19 Henry D. Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1988), 52. (Subsequent references to *Cape Cod* will be documented parenthetically in the text.)
- 20 Adams and Ross, *Revising Mythologies*, 133.
- 21 Adams and Ross, *Revising Mythologies*, 132.
- 22 Adams and Ross, *Revising Mythologies*, 128.
- 23 Henry D. Thoreau, *Excursions*, vol. 9 of *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1893), 69.

- 24 Thoreau, *Excursions*, 92.
- 25 Seybold, *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics*, 59.
- 26 Richardson, *Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance*, 135-36. Richardson quotes Sherman Paul, *The Shores of America* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1958).

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J. Parker Huber is author of *The Wildest Country: A Guide to Thoreau's Maine* (1981), "John Muir's Menu" (*Sierra*, November/December 1994), "John Muir and Thoreau's Maine" (*The Concord Saunterer*, Fall 1995); editor of the annual journal *Writing Nature*; and host of an annual retreat of nature writers since 1986. He is a psychotherapist, living in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Anne LaBastille is a professional ecologist and internationally recognized advocate of wildlife and wildland conservation whose awards include a Conservationist of the Year Gold Medal from the World Wildlife Fund and the highest award from the Outdoor Writers of America. The author of seven trade books, Dr. LaBastille was a commissioner of New York State's Adirondack Park Agency for seventeen years. She lives in a log cabin that she built at the edge of wilderness in the Adirondack Mountains and travels frequently for research and lectures.

David Lytle is a professor emeritus in the English department at Syracuse University. He is the author of essays, in various learned journals, on Jonathan Edwards, Charles Brockden Brown, Poe, Hawthorne, and Thoreau; of a book entitled *Studies in Religion in Early American Literature* (1983); and of two books of poetry. He races sailboats on the St. Lawrence River during the summer, and he, his wife, and their dog travel to warm places in their motor home during the winter.

Madeleine Minson is working on a doctoral dissertation about Thoreau's optimism and teaches English at University College London. She is also teaching part time at South Bank University in London, and her book reviews have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Journal of American Studies*.

James Porter, Australian author of several young adult novels on nature themes, including *The Swiftlet Isles* (1977), *Hapkas Girls* (1980), *Long White Cloud* (1989), *The Edge of the Rainforest* (1991), and *Piya* (1991), has also edited, with introduction, *Beachcomber's Paradise* (1983) and *Further Confessions of the Beachcomber* (1983), two volumes of selections from the nature writings of Edmund J. Banfield (1852-1923), an early Thoreau disciple in Australia. He is currently working on a personal memoir (with a strong Thoreauvian slant) titled *Isle of Springs*—about his own years on Bedarra Island, not far from Banfield's Dunk Island.

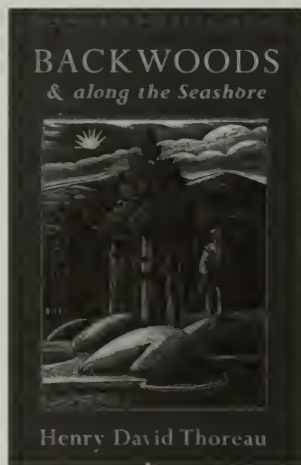
Sharlene Roeder is the author of "The Fall on High-Church Down in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*" (*Persuasions*, 1990). She coauthored "Understanding Nonverbal Communication" (*Dialogue*, 1990) and "Stigmatizing Artifacts and Their Effect on Personal Space" (*Psychological Reports*, 1989). She wrote "Uncaptured Monsters" in 1990, but only submitted it in 1996 at the enduring encouragement of Dr. Barbara Murray. Ms. Roeder has taught in both the English and the Philosophy departments at the University of Central Florida and is currently completing her first novel.

Laura Dassow Walls is Associate Professor of English at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. She has published several articles on Thoreau, Alexander von Humboldt, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and is the author of *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (1995). Currently she is working on a book on Emerson and metaphors of science.

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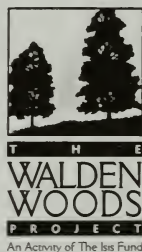
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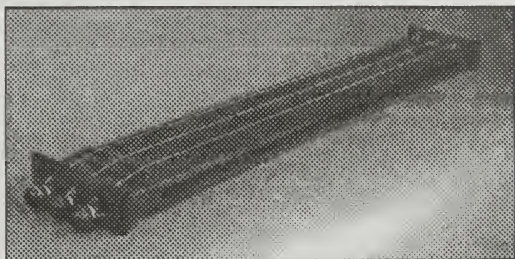


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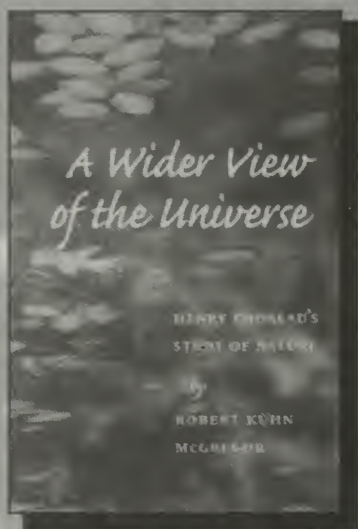


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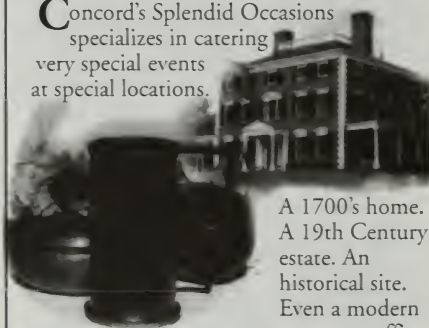
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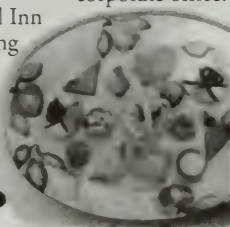
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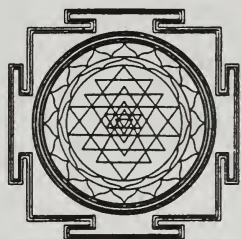
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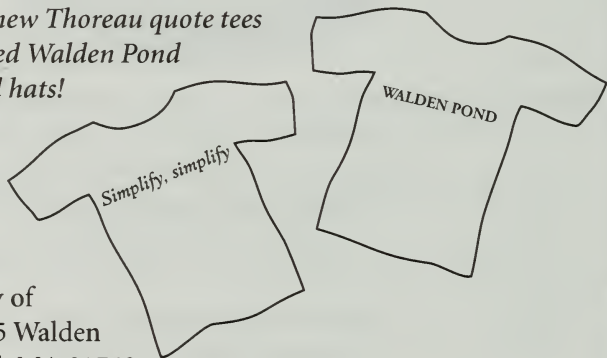
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